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—MARK LABBERTON, PRESIDENT OF FULLER SEMINARY

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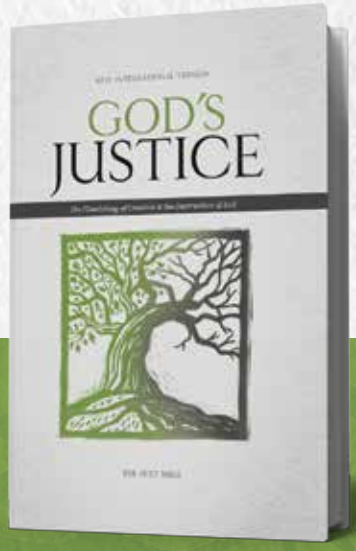

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"WHAT DO WE WANT?"

"Justice!"

"When do we want it?"

"Now!"

When it comes to patience, we—people committed to putting our faith into action for social justice—rarely have much to say. Compelled by what Martin Luther King Jr. called "the fierce urgency of now," we don't hesitate to rattle off a list of injustices that demand immediate action: too many stories of people killed for their faith; the devastation of climate change around the world; not to mention the power of the gun lobby, white supremacy, and toxic xenophobia here in the U.S. Faced with issues such as these, when we hear "patience," we often hear "justice delayed."

But as Tobias Winright explains in this month's cover story, patience is not "a naïve assumption that everything will simply turn out for the best." Dubbed "the greatest of all virtues" by early Christian writers, patience has a radical power that is essential for people of faith longing for more than quick fixes and bumper-sticker activism. According to Winright, a sort of prophetic patience is what led King to reject both "unplanned spontaneity" and "the 'do-nothingism' of gradualism," instead insisting that demonstrations be "carefully and prayerfully planned, with preparatory practice through training and workshops."

Winright's own understanding of patience was shaped by his three-and-a-half year struggle to recover from a traumatic brain injury. "I really didn't realize how hurt I was, or how long it would take to heal," writes Winright, a professor of theological and health-care ethics at St. Louis University. "I wanted to be normal, to be productive, and to move on." Instead, Winright was forced to confront his own vulnerability, an experience that led him to grapple with the patience and mercy God extends toward us—and that Christians are called to extend toward others, including our enemies. "I confess that I'm not yet sure how the virtue of patience, which I learned is essential to being a patient, should factor into how we face climate change and racism," writes Winright. "But I believe that patient encounter with the 'other' is key." ■

Letters

A Way Forward

Thank you for publishing Jim Wallis' excerpt "Crossing the Bridge to a New America" in the February 2016 issue. It has injected in me some much-needed optimism and energy. The idea that racism is, indeed, America's original sin is a powerful one that imbues in our fight against it a new hope. That we can and need to repent from this awful and systemic plague is both challenging and encouraging. With the murders of so many people of color—including Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, and Sandra Bland, among too many others—it becomes easy to slip into resigned indifference. But Wallis reminds us that we, as both a nation and as a church, need to accept and act on the truth, for it is the only way forward.

Charlene Cruz-Cerdas
Manchester, New Hampshire

The Original 'Original Sin'

Regarding the excerpt of Jim Wallis' *America's Original Sin* in the February issue, it seems to me that our treatment of Native Americans is just as much our "original sin" as our treatment of slaves.

Anne Courtright
Pueblo, Colorado

All Paths Lead to 'Us'

I have a good friend who used to identify herself on Facebook by saying "I'm a Socialist, like Jesus." Democratic socialism, as described in Danny Duncan Collum's article "Economic Democracy and the Common Good" (February 2016), appeals to me as a Jew and to another friend who is Buddhist and to another who is Muslim. It centers on the understanding that it's about "us," not simply "me." Isn't that what all of our paths are trying to teach us?

Steven Greenebaum
Facebook comment

Democratic socialism centers on the understanding that it's about "us," not simply "me."

Personal and National Responsibility

In response to "Economic Democracy and the Common Good," I would say that Christianity has long been concerned with the needs of "the least of these." There have also been times when the church has been more interested in survival and power, which resulted in the church selling out to those in power and ignoring the needs of others. The sacrificial ministry of Jesus points us personally in the direction of caring for the least of these, and the Torah, prophets, and even Jesus, in Matthew 25, also point to that being a national responsibility. Those who desire to walk in the path of Jesus walk in the direction of caring for those Jesus referred to in Matthew 25.

Dwain De Pew
Facebook comment

Reasons Why

I found the article "Twelve Years for a Paintbrush" (by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, January 2016) provided a compelling story and a relevant challenge to try to experience what it's like to be a prisoner or ex-convict. However, I was surprised that no mention was made as to the *reason(s)* for the wildly disproportionate number of African Americans who are incarcerated. Nor was there mention of Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*, which makes a strong case for the answer to that question: namely, the war on drugs and its intentional effort to control blacks.

Roger Brooks
Madison, Wisconsin

"But what about...?" *Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.*

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BY JIM WALLIS

Tweets from the Town Hall

TRAVELING AROUND the country this winter has given me a tremendous opportunity to promote multiracial truth-telling in many local communities as well as to foster multiracial commitments to action in service of racial justice.

During the first two weeks of the "town hall" tour around my new book, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*, we engaged an audience of tremendous diversity—multiracial, intergenerational, interfaith, secular, and intersectional. The audience and panelists at these forums have been baby boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials, and again and again we're seeing new insights and directions as a wide variety of people and perspectives are brought into the dialogue.

In Baltimore, leaders who were in the streets with their congregants following the death of Freddie Gray, such as Revs. Heber Brown III and Brad Braxton, talked about the lessons they learned from the protests and how those lessons must be applied across the country in the days to come.

"Our movement needs more than allies, we need accomplices."

In New York, Heather McGhee, president of the public policy organization Demos, said that successfully navigating our country into the new demographic reality—in a way that removes both privilege and punishment based on skin color—could be the first opportunity to truly realize our "American exceptionalism." I often speak against the notion of American exceptionalism, but I wholeheartedly agree with McGhee's assessment.

In Chicago, Rev. Julian DeShazier opened up one gathering with an "eyes wide open" prayer to look at who was in the room with us. His father, Robert Franklin Jr., had moderated the tour's first town-hall meeting at Auburn Seminary in New York.

In St. Louis, Pastors Starsky Wilson and Traci Blackmon hosted a weekend justice revival with me and Rev. James Forbes. They taught us all where and how they are finding God in the parable of Ferguson.

THERE HAVE BEEN many wonderful, unplanned moments. When I arrived at MSNBC's studios in New York to appear on *Morning Joe*, I was delighted to enter the green room and encounter Eddie S. Glaude Jr., a professor at Princeton University and the author of *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*. I asked Glaude, "What are you doing here?" and he responded, "To do a segment on the show with you!" I was thrilled, and we spent our prep time in the green room talking about how our two books were intertwined. On the show we had an exciting and encouraging dialogue with the hosts, resulting in Joe Scarborough saying he would have to read my book to figure out the meaning of "the idolatry of white Christianity."

There are a number of new books available on race in America, and we authors—black and white—are looking for ways to collaborate on public conversations that will bring multiracial voices together. In one such moment, I was speaking in Baltimore, and several of the people in the audience were live-tweeting my talk. At one point, as I do in all of my talks about this book, I lifted up the leadership of the young Ferguson protesters, including Brittany Packnett, who had told me that "our movement needs more than allies, we need accomplices." I speak every time about the tremendous importance of a new generation of young black activists, who have been pivotal in launching a national conversation about race, police violence, and our racialized criminal justice system and are building a national movement of action.

A young man in the audience named Ben Jancewicz relayed all of this to Packnett over Twitter. She was in St. Louis at the time and responded by asking Jancewicz to "please give Jim Wallis a big hug for me." Jancewicz tweeted back what I told him: I tell her story every time I speak, and people are having powerful conversations about how they can be accomplices. Packnett responded, "I just started crying in the nail salon."

These interactions encapsulate the power of social media networks such as Twitter to enable real-time interactions between people hundreds of miles apart. Days later, I got that hug from Packnett when I visited St. Louis.

Powerful voices of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American leaders are being lifted up, with honest response from, as Ta-Nehisi Coates so brilliantly puts it, "those Americans who believe that they are white." With each conversation we go deeper—gaining new insights, language, and examples from which to draw.

Together we are naming the foundational racial inequality that has plagued this country since its creation as our "original sin." Together we are exploring how repentance means more than just saying we are sorry and instead means turning around and going in a new direction, away from our ongoing injustices. And together we are proposing practical solutions to move us ever closer to the "beloved community" envisioned by Martin Luther King Jr. ■

***Jim Wallis** is editor-in-chief of* Sojourners *magazine.*

Zbigniew Bzdak/Chicago Tribune

Embodied Solidarity

Wheaton College and now-former professor Larycia Hawkins, right, announced Feb. 6 they would "part ways" after reaching a place of "resolution and reconciliation." The two-month dispute began when the evangelical college in Illinois claimed a Facebook post by Hawkins—"I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book. And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God."—was "inconsistent" with Wheaton's doctrinal convictions. In response, several dozen Hawkins supporters launched a "40 Day Fast of Embodied Solidarity," calling on Christian institutions to "confess and repent of the sins of racism, sexism, and Islamophobia."

By Myrna Pérez

Voting Rights—and Wrongs

We're in the midst of the biggest rollback of the right to vote since Jim Crow.

ELECTIONS BRING Americans together for a common cause—electing the leaders who are supposed to represent us, our families, and our communities. Just as we are all equal before God, voting is supposed to be an opportunity for us all to be equal: Young, old, rich, or poor, we each should have an equal voice in our democracy.

However, too many Americans may not have fair access to the polls in the upcoming election. Many citizens' votes have become collateral damage in a battle waged by politicians who want to rig the system so that some people can participate in our democracy and some cannot.

Since the 2010 election, 21 states have instituted new voting restrictions—the biggest rollback of the right to vote since the Jim Crow era. This year will be the first presidential election with many of these new barriers in place, from requiring photo identification (which millions of Americans do not have) to curtailing early voting (which many citizens depend on to cast their ballots). On top of this, voters will go to the polls in November with the fewest federal protections against racial discrimination in half a century, due to a 2013 Supreme Court decision gutting a key provision of the Voting Rights Act.

One of the most frustrating examples comes from my home state of Texas. After numerous failed legislative attempts, and amid procedural irregularities and dramatic Latino population growth in the state, the Texas legislature in 2011 passed the country's strictest photo ID law, requiring specific types of photo ID to vote. The law was crafted with surgical precision. For instance, voters can use a concealed gun license as proof of identification, but not a student ID card, even from a state university. All told, more than 600,000 registered Texas voters do not have the kind of ID now required to cast a ballot.

Previously, the Texas law was blocked under the "preclearance" provision of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. But in 2013, the Supreme Court rendered Section 5 inoperative, saying Congress needed to update the formula used to determine which jurisdictions had to comply with these preclearance procedures. This decision, stemming from a suit brought by a county in Alabama, affects voters across the country.

The decision freed Texas to implement its discriminatory photo ID law. The photo ID law was then challenged under a different provision of the Voting Rights Act and the U.S. Constitution. A federal trial judge ruled the photo ID requirement was discriminatory and illegal. Texas appealed the case to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which may be the country's most conservative appellate court. Nonetheless, last year the Fifth Circuit unanimously judged the photo ID law discriminatory and illegal. Now Texas has asked the entire Fifth Circuit to review the case. Meanwhile, despite three court rulings against it, Texas has been implementing this discriminatory law in every election it has held since 2013.

The news is not all bad, though. Other states are moving toward a system that brings us closer to the equal democracy we all deserve: automatic registration. Automatic registration is a groundbreaking reform that shifts the burden of registering eligible voters to the government by making two modest, but important, changes to traditional voter registration.

First, automatic registration signs up eligible citizens to vote when they interact with government agencies, unless they actively decide not to register. The change is subtle, but significant. (The current method requires the citizen to take affirmative steps to register.) The second change under automatic registration is in how government agencies transmit registration information. Instead of sending paper registration records that have to be entered by hand, automatic registration transfers voter registration information electronically. This is less tedious, results in fewer errors, and is much cheaper than relying on paper records. Both Oregon and California have passed laws allowing for automatic registration at motor vehicle offices, and similar bills have been introduced in nearly two dozen other states.

Both trends—rollbacks on access to the ballot box and efforts to modernize registration so that it's easier—show that there remains an active and ongoing fight over the right to vote. Voting lies at the root of democracy, and democracy is strengthened when more eligible voters are brought into the process. For us to have a democracy that is truly of, by, and for *all* of its people, we must ensure equal opportunity for every eligible citizen to participate. ■

***Myrna Pérez** is deputy director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law.*

By Alison J. Harrington

Seeking the Safety of the Temple

Citing a higher law, churches offer sanctuary to shield from deportation.

FOR CHRISTIANS who live near the U.S.-Mexico border, Jesus' command to "love our neighbors as ourselves" takes on a particular urgency when we see our neighbors fleeing violence from their home countries and then being deported back at an alarming rate.

At Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, where I am pastor, we have a history of loving our neighbors by offering them protective sanctuary to shield them from deportation.

Sanctuary is an ancient biblical tradition. In Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and 1 Kings, scriptures describe the right of asylum in cities of refuge set aside for those accused of manslaughter until the truth of the matter could be resolved. There is also the tradition of those who seek the safety of the temple by clinging to the "horns of the altar" (1 Kings 1:50).

In the U.S., churches involved in the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad provided sanctuary to escaping slaves. In the Vietnam War era, churches protected conscientious objectors. During the brutal wars in Central America in the 1980s, hundreds of U.S. churches declared a national sanctuary movement, protecting tens of thousands of refugees from being deported to almost certain death. Southside Presbyterian was one of the founding churches of the 1980s sanctuary movement.

In May 2014, after another wave of deportations, our congregation made a public declaration to once again become a sanctuary church. We welcomed Daniel Ruiz, a local undocumented father, into protection. After 28 days living in the church, he received a stay of deportation.

In August 2014, Rosa Robles Loreto entered into sanctuary at Southside. A mother of two boys, Rosa had lived in Tucson since 1999. She was pulled over while driving to work one day in 2010. "A sheriff stopped me and asked for my license. When I gave him my current Mexican one, he asked for my papers and I told him I didn't have any ... and he called immigration," Robles told the media. After two months in detention and the rejection of her appeal of deportation, it was determined

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From the Archives

April 1991

A Church Asleep?

AS I WRITE this, one week after the beginning of "Desert Storm," the networks have returned to their regularly scheduled programming, responding to polls the third day of the war indicating that Americans were tiring of the coverage. (Considering what we don't hear, "coverage" seems a wholly appropriate euphemism—just try to verify reports beginning to leak out of the war zone of 100,000 or 200,000 civilian casualties.) War news has become a mere refrain—"Allied forces continued today to pound Iraq ..."—punctuated with videotaped missile strikes or bemasked reporters and the horrific wailing of air raid sirens.

Official statements assuring that the war is going well (but don't expect it to end too soon) have become background music to business as usual: record fourth-quarter profits for the major oil companies, signs of resuscitation in the aerospace industry. Orwellian normalcy, except for the ritual dance of protesters and counterprotesters, the harassment of Arab-Americans, the silent fears of military families ...

Will the church sleep through this Gethsemane? Will our witness consist merely of donning yellow ribbons and praying for a speedy end to bloodshed? ... Above all, will we succumb to depression and impotence while the architects of war yet again "relentlessly pile wreckage upon wreckage at our feet"? Or will we have the courage and apocalyptic clarity to nonviolently challenge the system at its roots? ■

***Ched Myers** was a writer and activist in Los Angeles when this article appeared.*

by Rosa, her lawyer, and our congregation that the best option for her—the last option, really—was to enter into sanctuary.

For 461 days Rosa remained in our church, under our protective sanctuary. She lifts her voice for countless undocumented mothers like herself. Our congregation has learned that sanctuary is not just about welcoming someone into the sacred space of the church where law enforcement will not enter. It is about someone entrusting their life to the protection of a community that is mobilized to stop their deportation.

During the last three months of 2015, the border patrol detained 21,469 Central Americans traveling as families, according to *The Christian Science Monitor*. That's triple the 2014 number. And during the first few weeks of 2016, the Obama administration launched a series of deportation raids, primarily against women and children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

As Southside's pastor emeritus John Fife says, "When human lives are on the line, the only ethical act is to resist." As long as deportations of Central American mothers and children continue, we will resist in love the only way we know how: sanctuary.

Since May 2014, 12 others have publicly claimed sanctuary in churches across the U.S., including two at Southside. Ten have resolved their cases, including Rosa Robles Loreto, who returned home to her family in November. ■

***Alison J. Harrington** is the pastor of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Ariz.*

By Joy Carroll Wallis

Family Matters

The worldwide Anglican Communion disciplines the Episcopal Church over same-sex marriage.

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION is a beloved, global, traditional, innovative, challenging, frustrating, and sometimes very confusing institution. A lot like families I know.

On Jan.14, a majority of the Anglican senior leaders voted that, for a period of three years, no one from the Episcopal Church's 109 dioceses in the United States and 17 other countries may "[any] longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee, and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity."

This action came in response to a decision made by the Episcopal Church last July to remove its canonical language that confines marriage to unions between a man and a woman and authorizes two new marriage rites with language for use with same-sex or opposite-sex couples.

Yet the Anglican leaders also unanimously expressed their desire to "walk together in the grace and love of Christ" as this process unfolds.

This situation is being handled far differently than was women's ordination. In 1994, I was one of the first women to be ordained a priest in the Church of England, also a member of the Anglican Communion. Though Florence Li Tim-Oi became the first woman ordained as an Anglican priest in January 1944 in Hong Kong and the Episcopal Church in the U.S. legally ordained women in 1976, it took almost another 20 years for the Church of England to come to a common mind. And it wasn't until 2014 that the Church of England allowed women to be consecrated as bishops. There are still seven provinces in the Anglican Communion that do not allow women to be priests.

This is the slow process of watching a global family change. In the case of women's ordination, each part of the family decides for themselves, within their own cultural context, the right way forward in the right time.

It is clear that this recent act of censure on the part of the Anglican senior leaders is a desperate attempt to maintain unity in a communion whose more conservative members have threatened to walk away.

During our campaign for the ordination of women in England, the phrase "two integrities" was used. It was language that allowed for respect and understanding within a community where people hold very different views and interpretations of scripture. For us, it was a key to unity. It required open-hearted conversation, which required relationship, which required proximity.

I am encouraged that the Anglican leaders have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a working group "to maintain conversation among ourselves with the

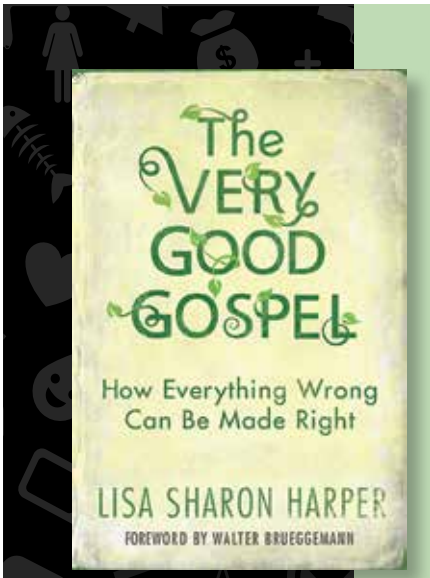
This is the slow process of watching a global family change.

intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognizing the extent of our commonality, and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ."

In looking for new ways to work out differences, the Anglican leadership would do better if women were represented in their number. (The only female provincial head retired last November.) Most Anglicans are women. Where are *they* when far-reaching decisions are made?

In 2007, when similar tensions arose in the Anglican Communion, Anglican women meeting at the U.N. and representing the diversity of women across the worldwide church issued this statement: "Given the global tensions so evident in our church today, we do not accept that there is any one issue of difference or contention which can, or indeed would, ever cause us to break our unity as represented by our common baptism. Neither would we ever consider severing the deep, abiding bonds of affection which characterize our relationships as Anglican women." ■

Joy Carroll Wallis, *author of* The Woman Behind the Collar, *was among the first women ordained to the priesthood in the Church of England, in 1994. Her husband, Jim Wallis, is editor-in-chief of* Sojourners.



The Very Good Gospel author Lisa Sharon Harper

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A THEOLOGY OF JUSTICE INITIATIVE FROM sojourners

BY LISA SHARON HARPER

Preaching While Female

A MILLION YEARS ago, when I was 23 years old, I sat in a lecture hall, flanked by college students who tutored at the youth program where I worked. They had invited me to their campus ministry's worship service. An Asian-American woman named Susan Cho—young (about my age), tall, straight-backed, clear-voiced, and refreshingly funny—stepped to the podium and began preaching.

I sat transfixed. She dove into the scripture and it came alive! She explained what was going on in the world of the biblical characters in a way that made it feel as if they were living today. I felt like I knew them—I understood them. And then she brought home the meaning of the text for our lives in Los Angeles, months after the 1992 riots. This woman gave one of the most dynamic and biblically accurate sermons I had ever heard.

Male dominance was never taught outright, but it was observed like a tenet of the faith.

But then a familiar thought came into my head: "This is heresy," it whispered.

You see, in college I was part of an evangelical ministry in which women could lead behind the scenes and share their testimony during worship services, but we could not preach or, for that matter, teach the scripture—especially to men. Ideas of male dominance were never taught outright, but they were observed like tenets of the faith.

Still, my passion for my faith compelled me to lead. I didn't teach, but instead I started leading the musical worship times for our large-group meetings. Leading these fellow students, I felt myself come alive. I marveled every week as I helped my friends make a closer connection to God through song.

Susan Cho

Urbana 2000 Missions Conference

Then one day my senior year, a man who had experience leading worship joined our ministry's staff team. Taking me aside, he said, "Now that I'm here, it's time for you to learn to follow." He led worship from that point on.

Through tears, I accepted it. After all, he was a man. What did I know? He was the older, wiser staff member. He must understand the Christian faith more than I do, I reasoned. All I wanted was to be faithful to Jesus. If this is what faithfulness looked like, I was willing. Instead, I focused on co-leading a weekly prayer group. Then several male members of the group called my leadership "heresy." Silenced, I was hurt and disillusioned. It was close to graduation day, so when commencement came, I didn't look back.

BUT LATER, WHEN I heard Susan Cho preach, it all came back. I sat there confused as she ended her talk. She was an evangelical, and yet she was preaching the scripture—with men present—and everybody was okay with it.

Over time I began to realize that the rules my college friends lived by were set by men, at a particular time, within a particular stream of the church—but it wasn't the only stream and I didn't have to choose it. There were other legitimate streams of the church that affirmed women's leadership.

In fact, in my own family, a long line of strong, faith-filled women made the road for me. I am descended from an enslaved woman who took her case to court and won her freedom in the 1600s. Women in her lineage went on to become well-known Quaker abolitionists and suffragists in the early 1800s. On another branch of our family tree, my faith-filled great grandmother joined the movement of women and men who risked everything to migrate north in the early 1900s, seeking respite from the horrors of Jim Crow. My grandmother helped shepherd her family through the travails of northern segregation and black poverty in mid-century Philadelphia. Later, my mom joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s and went on to fight for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s. God's lesson to me through my own lineage is: "God cares for the silenced ones and calls them to speak out for their own freedom and for the freedom of all who live with muted voices."

I eventually joined an evangelical church with a long history of ordaining women. I came to understand that all humanity was created in the image of God with the equal call and capacity to steward the world.

Being silenced wounded my soul. God healed it. Now when I rise and approach podiums to preach the scripture before women and men all over the world, I remember the strong women who fought for women's equality through the years. And I remember my mother and grandmother and their foremothers whose faith compelled them to call the world to recognize the image of God in all of us. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper *is Sojourners' chief church engagement officer and author of* The Very Good Gospel *(June 2016).*

—ADVERTISEMENT—

AN APPEAL TO CHRISTIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

This Appeal was written by Christians for Christians. Those who wrote it came from different parts of the country and from different denominations. As of mid-February over 2,800 Christian leaders had signed the Appeal. They include small-town pastors and pastors of large city churches; lay leaders; bishops and theologians—some of them more evangelical, some more "mainline."

We the undersigned are deeply concerned that in the current political climate many politicians and many in the media are calling on Christian voters to abandon our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to turn from His call to discipleship. We appeal to all of us who are seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus to reject such calls, to reaffirm our Christian commitments, and to seek to be agents of God's justice and reconciliation in the world.

A fundamental conviction of Christian faith is that God is sovereign over our lives, over all nations, and over the course of human history. When we abandon that faith we surrender to fear on the one hand and to pride on the other. Both pervasive fear and overweening pride violate our commitment to the lordship of Christ.

Because of fear we too easily caricature or condemn those who are different from us. Politicians and too many in the media stereotype African Americans, Asian Americans, people from Hispanic backgrounds and followers of Islam. If we follow their lead, we slander our neighbors and blaspheme against the one God of all peoples. **We resist such stereotypes and pledge to work for laws and practices that honor the dignity of all people.**

Because of fear we have armed ourselves beyond all reason and beyond reasonable restrictions. Politicians and too many in the media rush to stigmatize mentally disturbed people as if they were the source of all violence, promoting the illusion that more assault weapons in our homes and in our public places will make us safe. If we follow their lead and believe their illusions, we will not only live in the midst of growing violence but will also abandon our commitment to the Prince of Peace. **We resist such illusions and pledge that we will seek to limit the proliferation of guns in the U.S.**

Because of fear our politicians and too many in the media try to win our votes for themselves or their candidates by demonizing the refugee and immigrant. If we follow them we will turn from following Jesus who was once a refugee in a foreign land, and we will ignore the rich biblical injunctions to welcome the stranger. **We resist such enticements and pledge to be advocates for laws that regulate in a just and orderly manner the flow of refugees and immigrants.**

As Christians we call ourselves and our Christian brothers and sisters in the U.S. to reject these temptations that are being promoted among us. There is too much at stake for easy blasphemy. Let us resist publicly all politicians and leaders who exploit fear and pride. Let us help shape the character of our much loved land not by an abandonment of our most cherished Christian convictions but by following the counsel of the Prophet Micah—to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Examples of those who have already signed:

Rich Mouw
former president of Fuller Seminary

Gabriel Salguero
Pres., National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Cheryl Johns
Pentecostal and Church of God leader, Cleveland, Tenn.

William Barber
Disciples of Christ pastor and a leader of NAACP

Will Willimon
Former Methodist bishop

Weldon Nisly
Seattle Mennonite Church pastor

Jul Medenblik
President of Calvin Theological Seminary

Msgr. Richard Bozzelli
Saint Bernardine Roman Catholic Church of Baltimore

Join the conversation.

To read ***THE FULL APPEAL*** *& sign,*
http://goo.gl/rqcO1Q

Current list of signees (updated regularly)
http://goo.gl/KTHD8X

BY BILL McKIBBEN

Zika and Climate Change

WE SPEND, in the Christian tradition, a fair amount of time meditating on Mary as she waited to give birth.

But maybe this month it would be a good idea to meditate on the millions of women around Latin America and the Caribbean who are waiting to give birth—and doing so in a state of quiet panic.

Health ministers in countries such as Jamaica, Colombia, and Brazil were telling their (enormous) populations to avoid becoming pregnant. To avoid reproduction. To avoid the most basic task of any species. In El Salvador, the health minister said it would be at least 2018 before it would be safe to get pregnant. Think about that.

The culprit is a new disease, the Zika virus, which is mainly spread by mosquitos.

Not quite new, actually—it was found in Africa decades ago. But it's migrated to South America, perhaps during soccer's 2014 World Cup. And it appears to be having an entirely new effect. Though innocuous enough to those who catch it (flu-like symptoms so mild that most people don't even know they have it), it appears linked to a truly horrendous set of birth defects. In a normal year, Brazil has a couple of hundred cases of microcephaly, an incurable birth defect that may result in intellectual disabilities, seizures, and reduced life expectancy. In 2015, that number suddenly jumped to 4,000, and the best guess is that the Zika virus is the culprit.

In El Salvador, the health minister said it would be at least 2018 before it would be safe to get pregnant.

The disease spread very quickly through the Americas. By late January the Centers for Disease Control had listed 24 nations where they were warning Americans not to travel, at least if they had any intention of becoming pregnant. United Airlines announced refunds for any traveler with a ticket in the "Zika zone." A kind of epidemiological apartheid was suddenly underway.

City workers fumigate a neighborhood in Santa Tecla, El Salvador.

Jose Cabezas/Reuters

This disease is, in no small part, the result of the warming world we've built by our carbon emissions. As *Scientific American* explained, the hot, wet world we've created dramatically increases mosquito habitat—warmer temperatures broaden the geographic range of insects that carry deadly diseases. Paolo Zanotto, a virologist at the University of São Paulo's Biomedical Sciences Institute studying the Zika virus, put it this way: "The number of mosquitoes is increasing, their area of activity is increasing ... Global warming is probably collaborating with its spread to previously free areas." A Yale researcher added that "the direct effects of temperature increase are an increase in immature mosquito development, virus development, and mosquito biting rates, which increase contact rates (biting) with humans."

As usual, the people bearing most of the burden are those who have done the least to cause the problem—your average El Salvadoran produces very little in the way of carbon emissions. And this burden is almost unbearable—imagine, again, what it's like to be pregnant, too poor for testing, and terrified that your baby will be born with this birth defect.

Across the region governments are doing what they can—at this writing, Brazil had 220,000 troops in the field, turning over flowerpots and emptying tires of standing water to deprive mosquitoes of breeding grounds. But as the health minister said, "we are losing badly" in the fight.

Those of us who helped cause the problem have a moral obligation to provide all the help we can—and even more to make sure that we rein in climate change with all possible speed, so that the train of emergent diseases (West Nile, chikungunya, now Zika) tail off instead of gaining new steam.

Climate change is long past the stage of threat. It's now sinister and sad, and it demands action like nothing our generations have ever faced. ■

Bill McKibben, *a* Sojourners *contributing editor, is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.*

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Learning the Art of

PATIE

A serious injury—being a patient—helped me understand the importance of patience. How does that apply to our work for social justice?

by **TOBIAS WINRIGHT**

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT on July 23, 2012, I slipped and fell in the bathroom of our hotel room in downtown Indianapolis during a family vacation. My head slammed onto the sink and then the floor.

The noise from my fall awakened my spouse, but when she asked me what happened as I lay on the floor, all I said was, "I'm okay." Seeing no visible sign of injury, she returned to bed. A stomach bug was making the rounds, so she figured that it must have nabbed me. My vomiting every hour or so the remainder of the night only seemed to confirm this assumption.

At dawn, however, the first words out of my mouth were: "I think I cracked my skull. You'd better take me to the emergency room." My wife knew something must be wrong, because I never suggest going to the hospital right away. The physician on duty thought I probably had a mild concussion and that I would be able to go home that day, but a CT scan was needed to make sure.

Afterward, he told me that his earlier hoped-for diagnosis was wrong. Instead, I had fractured my skull, with a subarachnoid hemorrhage and a small epidural hematoma under my left frontal region. In other words, I had a traumatic brain injury, and my life was at risk. In fact, I immediately was loaded into an ambulance and taken to a hospital nearby where neurosurgeons would be better able to treat me.

For the first time in my life, I was hospitalized for several days—in Indianapolis and then back home in St. Louis. Prior to this I had never experienced such a serious injury, even during my earlier years of working in law enforcement. I couldn't keep much food down. I slept a lot. I was concerned about my family and, even though I was fortunate to have health insurance, I worried about the possible bills I might still have to pay. I also felt stressed about getting my syllabi ready for the courses I was supposed to start teaching in a few weeks. So I longed to get out of there as quickly as possible. In short, I was impatient.

I really didn't realize how hurt I was, or how long it would take to heal. Indeed, it has taken every bit of the last three-and-a-half years to do so. I wanted to be normal, to be productive, and to move on. Even after I was able to go home, I discovered, to my chagrin, that I pretty much had to stay in bed for a month or so. I tried one day to walk outside, and I nearly passed out. I reluctantly agreed to a semester off from teaching, but I kept reading and writing at home. I resisted having to be patient, but it was as a patient—as blindsided, vulnerable, and unprepared as I felt—that I was forced to learn to practice patience. I was learning firsthand the truth in something I'd read by Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches: "[I]f the first time we are called on to exercise patience is as patients, we will surely be unable, for there is no worse time to learn patience than when one is sick."

The patient as person

Since then, I have noticed in my bioethics courses that when the practice of medicine is examined, usually what is in mind is what physicians, nurses, and other health-care professionals do. But what about the patient?

Almost five decades ago, Methodist theologian Paul Ramsey, who was one of the pioneers of what would come to be known as medical ethics, published his book *The Patient as Person: Explorations in Medical Ethics*, which would become a classic in the field. It dealt with a number of burning issues at the time, which we continue to wrestle with now, including informed consent (especially in connection with research involving minors), the definition and diagnosis of death, end-of-life care and decision-making, organ transplantation, and the just allocation of medical resources.

Importantly, Ramsey held that these were not "problems on which only the expert (in this case, the physician) can have an opinion" but, rather, they have to do with "[b]irth and death, illness and injury," which we all experience: "They are moments in every human life." However, when I reread this book following my injury, I noticed that most of what Ramsey (as well as most subsequent bioethicists) wrote still was aimed toward physicians, policy makers, philosophers, and ethicists. Sure, the patient is regarded as a person, a subject, with moral agency, and not treated merely as a passive object; nevertheless, the patient does not have

It was as a patient—as blindsided, vulnerable, and unprepared as I felt—that I was forced to learn to practice patience.

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much of a role to play in this benchmark book.

Of course, simply emphasizing that the patient is a person was significant at the time as a counterweight to the paternalism of physicians. Ramsey emphasized that "*partnership* is a better term than *contract* in conceptualizing the relation between patient and physician," but, curiously, most of his attention remained devoted to the physician's part in all this—even though Ramsey alluded to "the need for a patient's partnership in his own cure."

Everything superfluous falls away

In my experience as a patient, there was something for me to do during my hospitalization and recovery—or, better yet, someone for me to be. Yes, I had to make decisions (of course, with my wife's helpful input) and sign forms, and I had to do things such as take my medications and try to walk a bit more each day. But, more important, even though at times I was very impatient, I realized that I wanted to be a certain kind of patient, a good one. It wasn't easy, but somehow, by the grace of God, I was able to be present, at least to some extent, to those who were caring for me.

It was difficult because, as M. Therese Lysaught insightfully observes, experiences of illness or pain "re-situate patients vis-à-vis their bodies, re-ordering taken-for-granted relationships between 'self' and 'body.'" Such an experience can be alienating, Lysaught writes, and can occupy so much of one's attention that it "crowds out awareness of anything else"—it can even "isolate patients from those close to them and prevent them from effectively communicating their distress to medical practitioners."

Whenever I have stubbed a toe over the years, that little appendage occupies my attention. As St. Paul wrote, "Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but many ... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:14, 26). Imagine if that member were one's head. Lysaught adds that "patients often experience a loss or usurpation of their 'voice'" because the pain or illness is inexpressible. Having to put a number on the level of my pain was as hard for me as writing an academic paper.

Sheila Crow, a medical ethicist who was diagnosed with cancer, writes that "everything superfluous falls away, leaving only what is truly important." That was my experience, although I would qualify it a bit, making it only *who* is truly important.

Not long before his death, St. Thomas Aquinas, author of the *Summa Theologica*, reportedly said, "I have seen things which make all my writings like straw." I realized in the hospital that what really mattered for me was *who* mattered to me: my family, for sure, but also many others, from the EMTs who transported me in their ambulance to the nurses who took time to talk with me as they checked my vital signs day and night, and

from the hospital chaplains who chatted with me about theology to friends who visited me in the hospital and provided meals for my family and those on Facebook who sent their good wishes and prayers. Instead of an interruption, each was a gift to me. They taught me to be present, and each helped me to learn patience.

'Patience is God's nature'

Patience, after all, must be learned, and it must be learned through practice with other people. According to the early Christian writer Lactantius, patience "is the greatest of all the virtues." Virtues are good habits and dispositions that form and shape our character, that make us who we are. At the same time, they express our character. So it wasn't a good reflection on my character whenever I was impatient as a patient.

In an essay about Ramsey's *The Patient as Person*, William F. May writes that patients are confronted "with something to do and things to decide, but, far more profoundly, such crises assault identity—they force their victims to decide who and how they will be." Such crises, he adds, "must be faced rather than solved," and doing so "demands a restructuring of habits and rituals" rather than formulating a solution.

Virtues—such as courage, wisdom, humility, self-restraint, and fidelity—are needed to help patients follow through with decisions they make. Interestingly, May leaves out the virtue of patience for patients.

Sadly, the virtue of patience has been largely ignored in Christian ethics. In the best book on the subject, *Patience: How We Wait Upon the World*, published in 1997, David Baily Harned observed, "In the course of a century and a quarter, scarcely a handful of books in Christian theology and ethics written in English have been devoted to the importance of patience."

However, the virtue was prominent in earlier Christian accounts of the moral life, and while teaching my War and Peace in the Christian Tradition course this past year, I was struck by how this was especially true in connection with being a peaceable people. For Tertullian, an early church leader, "patience is God's nature," and Christians should likewise be patient by the grace of God. And because patience is "the mother of Mercy," Christians are to be merciful toward others, including our enemies. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, wrote similarly that we should have God's patience "abide in us ... the divine likeness, which Adam had lost by sin, be manifested and shine in our actions."

Why we can't wait, and why we must

Why was I initially impatient as a patient? Probably because I am a part of Generation X, with an attention span that resonated with MTV's music videos. Also, I have become accustomed as part of contemporary U.S. culture to instant messaging, instant coffee, instant food,

Patience, after all, must be learned, and it must be learned through practice with other people.

PATIE

and instant gratification. Our lives today are really at odds with the virtue of patience.

Plus it is not to be denied that there is indeed a sense of urgency for us to address a number of major issues we face, including racism and climate change. Pope Francis, in his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, refers to our "urgent challenge" and offers his urgent appeal to "protect our common home." Likewise, the past year and a half of more than 1,000 police shootings that have killed fellow citizens, including a disproportionate number of African Americans, is an urgent matter demanding our attention and actions. Other matters likewise urgently demand our attention. Retrieving the virtue of patience is not meant at all to diminish the urgency of any of these important issues. Aquinas warned about vices that had a "semblance" of virtues, and there are vices that may resemble but aren't patience, including a naïve assumption that everything will simply turn out for the best.

In *Why We Can't Wait*, Martin Luther King Jr. noted the importance of understanding that it was not because "of a sudden loss of patience" on the part of African Americans that they undertook nonviolent direct action in 1963; after all, he said, they "had never really been patient in the pure sense of the word" since "waiting was forced upon" them by the psychological and physical shackles of society. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," he explained how for hundreds of years African Americans had heard the word "Wait!" But that word "almost always meant 'Never.'"

"There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over," King wrote, and there arises a "legitimate and unavoidable impatience." However, although understandable, "unplanned spontaneity" was as wrong, in his view, as the "do-nothingism" of gradualism and complacency. He emphasized that demonstrations and protests should be carefully and prayerfully planned, with preparatory practice through training and workshops.

I confess that I'm not yet sure how the virtue of patience, which I learned is essential to being a patient, should factor into how we face climate change and racism and other urgent issues, but I believe that patient encounter with the "other" is key. For now, I have found that I am more patient with my students, including those who are late with their papers (don't tell them) and those who are athletes with head injuries. I am also more patient with worship and the liturgy—and with those in the church who preside and participate. It is through the faces that I encounter in these places that I learn to practice patience, especially through their, and God's, patience with me. ■

Tobias Winright, *a* Sojourners *contributing writer, recently edited* Can War Be Just in the 21st Century? Ethicists Engage the Tradition *(Orbis Books, 2015).*

No New
Children
Jail
House of Prayer
Schools & Jobs
NOT
JAILS

Activists prepare to protest at the Howard S. Wright construction company, which has been contracted to build a new youth prison in Seattle.

Photos by Alex Garland

Not Your Mama's Prison Ministry

In Seattle, churches and activists work to dismantle the cradle-to-prison pipeline—one youth jail at a time.

by **ALICIA de los REYES**

ON THE SUNNY Monday before Easter 2015, roughly 60 people, some wearing clerical collars, gathered in front of Key Arena in Seattle. "Build futures, not cages," one sign read. "Love youth/build hope/invest in futures," read another.

The timing of this protest against a proposed new youth jail in Seattle's Central District was no accident: Activists had dubbed it Holy Table-Turning Monday, a commemoration of Jesus flipping over the tables of money changers in the temple square in Jerusalem.

The group, a mix of church people—Methodist, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, and others—and organizers from Youth Undoing Institutional Racism (YUIR) and Ending the Prison Industrial Complex (EPIC), crossed the street and entered the lobby of a building housing the offices of Howard S. Wright, the contractor hired to construct the proposed detention center. An uneasy PR man walked out from the glass-walled offices and chatted with a pastor in a purple stole.

Meanwhile, members of the group set up a card table and laid a purple tablecloth on it. They piled it high with nickels, symbolizing the 30 pieces of silver Judas received in exchange for his betrayal of Jesus, and cards with handwritten messages. "Change agent," one said. "Be accountable to our history and dismantle the prison-industrial complex," said another. The group prayed, acknowledging their own complicity in the system they sought to destroy. Then, as a unit, they flipped the table over.

Nickels crashed to the ground and the tablecloth fell in a heap of purple and lace. Folding up the table, the group

A mother waits with her daughter at a protest against a new youth jail in Seattle.

walked out. A few office workers peeked out into the lobby.

Round up the usual suspects

Table-Turning Monday was a drop in the tidal wave of protest against the new youth jail that has been sweeping through Seattle and the surrounding King County for more than three years. The current facility, a leaky building administered by the King County government but located in a historically black Seattle neighborhood known as the Central District, hasn't been updated since 1972, according to the *South Seattle Emerald*.

Although a new jail was approved by 55 percent of county voters in 2012, it has been the subject of intense debate almost from the outset, with YUIR and EPIC among the groups that have led protests, including the one on Table-Turning Monday. NoNewYouthJail, a project of Washington Incarceration Stops Here, names 36 local organizations that want an alternative to the new jail.

To these groups, the "Children and Family Justice Center," as it is to be called, is not simply a new civic building to replace one in desperate need of repair. Rather, it is the latest incarnation of institutionalized racism that has marginalized black communities in the United States as far back as the colonial era. According to a 2012 report by the Task Force on Race and the Criminal Justice System, while "black youth make up 6 percent of the Washington population, they make up 21 percent of youth sentenced" to state facilities. Recent numbers run even higher: *The Seattle Globalist* reports that although the total number of youth in prison has decreased, more than 50 percent of all incarcerated youth are black. Black and white youth commit roughly the same number of crimes. But black youth are sentenced far more often than white youth.

These statistics should surprise and enrage us. Yet racial bias is so engrained in society that across race, class, and age, people have been socialized to expect violence from black men and crime from the black community. Michelle Alexander details the system of "rounding up" and incarcerating black men in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Alexander, a former lawyer for the ACLU, argues that jails and prisons are the latest tools for social control of the black population. Eliminating a youth jail in Seattle is only one step toward challenging this larger system of disproportionate incarceration, but it could create measurable change.

'My goal is to put myself out of a job'

The day after Table-Turning Monday, King County executive Dow Constantine issued a statement that the number of beds in the new jail would be capped at 112, just over half the number at the current facility. County councilmembers said they'd seek $4 million to help shift to a "restorative and transformative justice model," including education and alternative rehabilitation programs that are "meaningful to youth."

Black and white youth commit roughly the same number of crimes. But black youth are sentenced far more often than white youth.

In September, the Seattle City Council adopted a resolution setting a goal of zero youth detention, following an assessment by the Seattle Office for Civil Rights that found that the new jail would have negative effects on youth of color. And in November, the council also passed an amendment to the city budget to spend $600,000 on alternatives to incarceration through the Social Justice Fund. The allocation directly funds community groups working to change the prison system, according to Sarra Tekola of the office of councilmember Mike O'Brien, one of the sponsors of the measure.

Still, it isn't clear what will happen to youth in the current system, and as of this writing King County is on track to construct the new youth facility.

A social movement is still needed to address the racist treatment that follows black youth from incident to court to prison. The image of the black man as criminal and black youth as future criminal must change. Some churches are engaging this issue by practicing radical hospitality to those "re-entering" society from the criminal justice system (although "re-entry" seems a false promise in a system where ex-convicts are barred from jobs, housing, food stamps, and other social services). This new "prison ministry" goes beyond visiting prisoners to taking action that will change the prison system entirely.

Several church members from across the city attended a "Healing Communities" conference at First AME Church of Seattle last spring. The Healing Communities model gives congregations a frame for providing direct accompaniment and support to those returning from prison or those at risk for incarceration. It also teaches church members how to advocate for policy changes.

The upper room of the church, an

Demonstrators explain to representatives at the Howard S. Wright company why they oppose the firm's contract to build a new youth jail.

imposing brick building in the heart of the Central District, was filled with Lutherans, Episcopalians, Quakers, Unitarians, and even a Catholic police officer—the first officer to attend this conference—ready to learn how to make their congregations places of transformation for those incarcerated, as well as for those who minister to them. Many had read *The New Jim Crow*; some had participated in prison ministry before by visiting inmates or becoming pen pals.

The conference was led by Doug Walker, the national coordinator for criminal justice reform for the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society, who also spoke from his own experience of incarceration and return. Walker, a former pastor, exhorted the group to "change the face of incarceration in Washington."

"My goal is to put myself out of a job," Walker explained. In the future, he doesn't want to have to educate anyone about the statistics—that 1 in 35 people in the U.S. are imprisoned or on probation or parole, leaving 2.7 million children with parents who are incarcerated. He shared a framework for thinking about prison ministry: action, conversation, education, relationship, and acceptance, followed by transformation on both sides. "It doesn't require grant proposals," Walker said.

There are simple ways churches can radically care for people, Walker said. For example, when someone is arrested, members of the choir, ushers, and mothers in the congregation could gather in court, just as they do for a funeral.

No one is well-served by the status quo

Though the majority of attendees at the Healing Communities conference were white, the "No New Youth Jail" movement is dominated by both black and white young men and women; both EPIC and YUIR are coalitions led by people of color. Some of the white progressives in this fight are striving to defer to African-American leaders, those affected most by incarceration. As Ryan Scott, a white man who served as a ministerial intern at Valley and Mountain, the church that initiated the radical Holy Mondays five years ago, said, "We don't get to be Jesus in this story."

There are those who disagree with the movement entirely. "We need a prison for those who are already criminals," said Rev. Terri Stewart, a youth chaplain who works with kids in jail. She is looking forward to being able to meet with residents in private rooms in the proposed facility instead of the public hall she must use at the current jail. This view is shared by others who work with incarcerated youth who are violent.

And the desires of the group are not necessarily as unified as its message. YUIR and EPIC held a forum to explain their goals and invited local politicians. In a video of the forum, representatives from YUIR and EPIC called for the $210 million that is currently set aside for the new jail to be spent on other programs to benefit underserved youth, such as recreational programs. Others wanted the money to be spent to update the current facility, while some contended that there should be an alternative system put in place immediately, or that the money should be invested to improve education and health care in the city.

Still, the theme unifying all these independent groups is that no one is well-served by the current system.

She knows what these kids need

Perhaps the biggest problem is that the most important voices—those of black men and women in the Central District—go unheard unless they are shouting alongside white ones. Churches in this neighborhood have long been a part of traditional and nontraditional prison ministry because so many of their friends and family members have been incarcerated. Of the 40 people at the Healing Communities conference, nine had relatives in prison. Almost every single person of color in attendance knew someone in prison.

Velena Bryant, a member of Ebenezer AME Zion, spent time in and out of jail for many years—until a judge caught her reading John Cheever and set her on the road to college. Now, she counsels "baby felons" through programs such as a community garden. She has dozens of ideas for alternatives to a youth jail and wishes there was "eat and sleep school" so that these kids could enjoy three square meals and sufficient rest. Familiar with the problems that give rise to youth crime—HIV, instability at home, drug use—she knows what these kids need. If she had a say in it, Bryant would fill residents with education.

Despite Bryant's positive contribution to youth prisoners, she feels excluded from the system that decides what happens to her neighborhood. "If they're going to build a new baby prison, that's what's going to happen," she said.

Her feeling that her community is disenfranchised is more than just a perception: Former felons are barred from voting in 12 states, and those on parole are barred in 20 states. Only two states allow current prisoners to vote (Maine and Vermont, whose populations happen to be more than 90 percent white). The Sentencing Project estimates that 1 in every 13 African Americans are prohibited from voting. Bryant argues for a better way: "If we can be rehabilitated, we make better choices and actually become more positively productive."

Sonny Dudley is a member of the Ebenezer men's singing group, which periodically visits youth in prison. "I don't think it's right to lock people up," he said. Dudley would prefer a true rehabilitation center instead of a new youth jail. "I think you're sending a bad message when you say you're going to build this 'prison' for kids," he said.

It's as though you're setting them up for failure.

Had these folks who work with those in prison or at risk of incarceration been a bigger part of the decision-making process, perhaps the new youth jail would have looked different from the start. ■

Alicia de los Reyes *is a freelance writer in Seattle. She is a member of Valley and Mountain Fellowship church.*

'This is My Church Too'

LGBTQ Christians talk about why they stay in denominations that are less than affirming • *by* BETSY SHIRLEY

IN OCTOBER 2014, at the age of 35, Ingrid Olson stood before her church of many years. "I am loved," she told the 80 or so members of her congregation seated in the sanctuary on that Sunday evening. "I am God's child. I am accepted—completely." Olson listed other parts of her identity: her curiosity, athleticism, passion for music, Swedish heritage, her tendency to be passive-aggressive. "I am a sister, a daughter, a niece, a granddaughter, a friend," she continued. Then she added something most people in the church didn't know: "I am a Christian, lesbian woman."

Olson is a lifelong member of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), a denomination with Swedish-Pietist roots and 850 congregations in North America. Though the central identity of ECC churches is found in six "affirmations," including the authority of scripture, the importance of missions, and the experience of personal rebirth, the ECC is not what's known as an "affirming" church—one that encourages LGBTQ members to participate in the full life of the congregation, including marriage, church leadership, and ordination. Delegates at the 2004 ECC annual meeting voted to make binding a resolution that asserts the "biblically rooted" position on human sexuality is "heterosexual marriage, faithfulness within marriage, abstinence outside of marriage." While the ECC might not say that *being* gay is a sin, it would certainly say that pursuing a same-sex relationship is out of the question.

Illustration by Jon Krause

I met Olson for coffee just under a year after she came out to her small Covenant church. She described the years of shame, prayer, therapy, and ex-gay ministry that followed her teenage realization she wasn't attracted to men. "A miracle of God," says Olson, when I ask how she eventually found the courage to tell her church she was a lesbian. "And I say that sort of kidding, but sort of not," she adds.

Since then, Olson has experienced a few moments she describes as "pure redemption," including the standing ovation and onslaught of hugs she received that night. And she definitely has a team of allies within the ECC, including people who disagree with the denomination's official position. But just as often, Olson has found herself thinking, "I don't know if I can deal with this." Currently single but open to dating, Olson knows that if she were in a relationship with a woman, many people in her church would view it as sin and question her fitness for leadership.

Furthermore, in fall 2015, the ECC released guidelines that not only maintain heterosexual marriage as the only biblical norm, but also forbid ECC pastors from participating in same-sex marriages and prohibit ECC buildings from being used for same-sex weddings. Though the guidelines acknowledge some pastors might not agree, the document states that ministers who find themselves "in permanent on-going disagreement" have two

options: "either yielding to the position and practice of the ECC, or concluding service with the ministry and/or the ECC." In other words: It's okay to disagree as long as you obey or leave.

'I'm not going anywhere'

This is what I wanted to know from Olson: Why not just find a new church, one where it wouldn't be complicated to serve on the leadership team, have a girlfriend, and maybe one day get married?

Olson has considered leaving, but for now, she explains, she has reasons to stay: She hopes to help the ECC become more welcoming to folks who aren't straight—or, at minimum, at least make room for multiple opinions. As a layperson, Olson knows she can challenge the leadership of the ECC in ways pastors can't. "I'm not going anywhere, so you're going to have to figure out what to do with me," says Olson, explaining the message she hopes staying sends to the denomination's leadership.

Whenever she's thought about leaving, explains Olson, she always goes back to the night when she came out to her church. Specifically, the moment right before she began to speak.

"I knew everybody there," says Olson. "And it wasn't just that I knew their name, but I knew their stories and their kids and their good and their bad and before I started talking, I just felt like I was supposed to look at everyone." So as she surveyed those present—the people who had been her community, her family, ever since she arrived at the church 13 years earlier for a post-college ministry internship—she told them they were "her people" and she was sharing her story up front because she loved them.

"I really do believe that God gave me that moment to go back to so I won't leave," says Olson. So, at least for now, she's staying put.

Disagreeing with the hierarchy

In a not-so-distant past, when "Christian" and "gay" appeared in the same headline, it was rarely good news for folks in the LBGTQ community. But in recent years, that's begun to change. "Tennessee Evangelical Church Welcomes the LGBT Community," read a 2015 headline. "Presbyterian Group Changes Marriage Definition to Include Same-Sex Couples." "How Episcopalians Embraced

"This is my church too," says Margaret Uselman. "I don't want to feel chased out."

Gay Marriage." "Baptist Church Ordains Trans Woman." And though some Christians have refused to change their tone, it's now apparent that they don't speak for all people of faith. "Right-Wing Pastor Tells Christians to Boycott Same-Sex Weddings. These Christians Disagree," stated one October 2015 headline.

To be sure, the church still has a long a way to go to be fully welcoming. According to a 2013 survey, 29 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults had been made to feel unwelcome in a place of worship at some point during their lives. Not surprising, a survey conducted the following year found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults (the survey didn't ask about transgender identities) were significantly less likely than the general population to identify as Christian.

But while headlines and polls are helpful for mapping trends, they never tell the full story. LGBTQ Christians who opt to stay in churches that aren't affirming—and their varied reasons for this—often fall outside the dominant narratives.

Take Margaret Uselman, a junior at St. Norbert College, a Catholic liberal arts school near Green Bay, Wis. Though Uselman says she grew up in a conservative Catholic diocese where the bishop never missed an opportunity to emphasize that marriage was "between one man and one woman," she says did not experience a major conflict between her faith and sexuality when she came out in high school. "I just never felt it was wrong," explains Uselman, who now identifies as a bisexual woman. "I always felt that, no, this is who I am, and I should be accepted for that."

Uselman credits her family, especially her mom, for teaching her that it was okay to disagree with the church's hierarchy. Though her parents now attend a Lutheran church, Uselman still feels mostly at home in Catholicism. "I do think that's kind of weird sometimes," she admits. "This place that I know isn't inclusive and I know is sexist, why does this feel like where I still want to be?" And though there is a lot Uselman likes about the Catholic Church, especially its social teaching on the dignity of people, she can't always explain why she stays.

"This is my church too," she says after a pause. "I don't want to feel chased out."

For other LGBTQ Catholics, the journey toward finding a home in the Catholic Church has been difficult. "There is no infrastructure within the church to support me as a gay man," wrote Bill Dickinson, a former Roman Catholic priest who came out—and resigned from the priesthood—at age 54. "And the church is not at her best when speaking to and about people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or even questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity."

Even though the Catholic Church shows little sign of changing its teaching on sexuality, Dickinson has remained in the church and wants to help Catholic leaders become better ministers to LGBTQ people. "As someone who was a Roman Catholic priest and who understands my own sexual orientation, I am offering to be a part of the solution for the church leaders in their struggling relationship with LGBT people," wrote Dickinson in an op-ed for The Daily Beast.

Creating more intersections

It's a strange time to be a queer Mennonite. Though there are certainly affirming Mennonite congregations, delegates at the denomination's 2015 general convention voted to reaffirm guidelines forbidding same-sex weddings and upholding traditional marriage. Yet the delegates also resolved to "forbear" with congregations whose beliefs and practices regarding same-sex unions differed from the denomination's guidelines. "Pick a category of people at the Mennonite Church USA convention," began one report from the conference, "and

you could identify their pain."

But despite the pain, Christian Parks—who identifies as "a queer person of Choctaw and African descent whose faith is informed by Mennonite tradition" and serves on the leadership of Pink Menno, a group working toward the full support and inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in the Mennonite Church USA—has chosen to stay.

Parks' reasons for remaining in the Mennonite church amount to something like an Anabaptist liberation theology of potlucks. "If there is nothing else the Mennonite church knows how to do, they know how to have a potluck," says Parks. "That's where we best meet Jesus." Gathering at a potluck is really gathering at Christ's table, "a table of fullness to radical love," Parks explains. "And what Anabaptism teaches me is that liberation happens when my table starts looking vastly different from who I am."

Christian Parks' reasons for remaining in the Mennonite church amount to something like an Anabaptist liberation theology of potlucks.

So for Parks, the denomination's refusal to fully welcome and affirm LGBTQ members feels like sitting at a potluck while the people across the table refuse to pass the casserole. "You just want to turn your chairs around like we're not there," says Parks. "But we're at the table going, 'We can't eat until you come back.'"

The conversation isn't just about same-sex marriage or even sexual orientation, Parks reminds me. White supremacy, sexism, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, classism, xenophobia—for Parks, they're all part of what has kept Christ's table from being a table of truly radical love and can't be talked about in isolation. "This is what my queerness offers me," Parks explained: "the ability to create more intersections."

Should I stay or should I go?

Yet staying isn't always the right answer. Almost everyone I talked with emphasized that just as they have found particular reasons to stay, there are plenty of reasons why it might be wise for LGBTQ Christians who find themselves in churches that aren't affirming to leave and find a new church.

If one of Parks' LGBTQ friends in the Mennonite Church felt they could no longer stay in the Mennonite community, Parks says he would certainly support them in finding somewhere new to worship. "If this isn't the place where love is liberating you anymore, how can I help you find your liberation?" he says.

When Erica Lea, a pastoral resident at a Baptist church in Washington, D.C., talks with LGBTQ friends or parishioners who are thinking about leaving their church, she first tries to understand if it's a situation of spiritual abuse. "If you're in a context that is spiritually abusive, you leave," says Lea. "Spiritual abuse is real, and I wish folks would recognize it and talk about it more," she adds. "And LGBTQ and gender issues are not its only sources."

But even when spiritual abuse isn't present, Lea recognizes that there are times when it may be best for an LGBTQ Christian to leave and find a more affirming church. In making this determination, she stresses the importance of "deep personal discernment," ideally with a spiritual director. Leaving just to make a big scene is probably not the most productive, says Lea. But leaving because you feel an authentic call to be somewhere else may make sense.

"I've been able to have significant—and at least twice, life-saving—conversations with folks because I'm a pastor, and because I'm out." —Erica Lea

As a pastor who is publicly out and a dual member of the Baptist and Mennonite traditions—neither is affirming at the denominational level but both include many affirming congregations—Lea has wrestled with this discernment process herself.

For Lea, her decision to stay is ultimately tied to her vocation as a minister—something she's spent a lifetime discerning. "Since I've come out, I regularly receive Facebook messages or emails from folks who say, 'I'm gay and I'm Christian' or 'I'm transgender and I'm Christian,'" she explains. "And I've been able to have significant—and at least twice, life-saving—conversations with folks, mostly young adults, because I'm a pastor, because I'm serving the church, and because I'm out." And that gives her a lot of energy for her work as a pastor. "I just feel like I'm on the right track," she says.

Lea admits with a wry laugh that serving as a pastor in traditions that aren't affirming isn't—in her words—"all rainbows and unicorns," but she's found a great sense of peace in her decision to stay. "It's not just a matter of how can I survive and serve a church and feel satisfied with my life," says Lea. "It's 'how can I contribute and serve?'" ■

***Betsy Shirley** is assistant editor of* Sojourners.

Life Preservers

Lebanon has taken in more than a million refugees from Syria and Iraq. One group of women has cooked up a way to make them feel at home • *by* **ANNA LEKAS MILLER**

AFRAH ZOUHEIR FLEXES HER HAND as she purposefully stirs a pot of lemon juice, the fruity aroma filling the air as it rises to a boil.

"It needs to be hot in order to mix well with the sugars before it cools down and thickens," she explains. "Then we bottle it and let it settle into a syrup."

Freshly rolled balls of yogurt cheese at the House of Mouneh, a business that employs local and refugee women in Falougha, Lebanon.

Photos by James Haines-Young

A worker pours lemon juice into glass bottles at the House of Mouneh, which offers a variety of cordials and juices. Below, finished jars of preserved vegetables and yogurt cheese balls.

Zouheir has all of the looks of a professional chef. Her shoulder-length dark brown hair is tied back in a hairnet and her hands are coated in plastic gloves. She wears an apron over her sweatshirt, fanning the air, making sure that the lemon syrup drink she is making smells as it is supposed to; she appears undaunted about managing multiple pots simultaneously simmering over an open fire.

However, this is her first time working in a kitchen—at least professionally. In Mosul, Iraq, where she is from, she was a kindergarten teacher. But when the Islamic State invaded her home city in late 2013 and began targeting religious minorities, including Christians like Zouheir's family, she grabbed her belongings and fled to Lebanon with her husband and four children. After a short stint in Beirut, the capital city, where rent is expensive and prejudice against refugees, among other factors, makes work hard to come by, she and her husband moved to Falougha, a mountain village where the air is fresh and, most important, the rent is cheap.

"It is too expensive for a family of six to live in Beirut," she says. "We can have a better life here."

In Falougha, Zouheir discovered the House of Mouneh, a collective of 11 women from Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq who gather each day to prepare *mouneh*—an all-encompassing Arabic term meaning "to store" and, in practice, referring to anything that preserves or is preserved. It is everything from jams and syrups made from locally grown seasonal fruits and vegetables to regional delicacies such as stuffed cabbage and grape leaves, stored and preserved in fresh olive oil.

Cooking up friendships

While the *mouneh* made at the House of Mouneh is bourgeois by design, packaged in artistic jars and sold online and at boutique fairs, as a concept *mouneh* isn't just an upscale regional tradition. With centuries-old roots in the Middle East, *mouneh* has also been an essential tool of survival during times when food was scarce or modern conveniences—such as refrigeration—were not available. *Mouneh* sustained families in remote villages under siege during Lebanon's 15-year civil war, which ended in 1990 and is still a fresh memory for many. More recently, preserved *makdous*, a kind of chili-spiced eggplant, has kept Syrians warm during the winters of the ongoing Syrian war when electricity is cut due to bombings and airstrikes.

"I love it," Zouheir says, smiling from her post in the small, industrially equipped kitchen at the House of Mouneh. "I love getting to prepare such an important food with all of these other women from different backgrounds. We're forming great friendships."

Zouheir's lemon syrup—which is mixed with water for a refreshing fruit cocktail—is one of many ongoing operations in the House of Mouneh. In the refrigerated hallway outside the kitchen, Dunia Hajj, a native of Falougha and no stranger to the preparation of *mouneh*, strains fresh milk into balls of *labneh*—a sort of lovechild between yogurt and cheese and a staple of Lebanese breakfasts and *mezze* platters. While some of the *labneh* balls are served plain, preserved in jars of olive oil, others are rolled in *zataar*, a popular spiced thyme, or chili powder, for those with a spicier palate.

"There is a little something for everyone," Hajj says, smiling. "You can't find something you won't like."

In a corner room, several other women sit around three tables chopping fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, and parsley before mixing in rice and spices and rolling it all in cabbage leaves to make *malfouf*—another regional delicacy preserved in oil, drawing from Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi cuisines.

"We have such a mix of cultures and cooking styles represented here," says Hajj with pride, taking a break from rolling *labneh* balls to offer a tour of the facilities. "Afrah and Rania showed us how to make the *malfouf* with extra spices, Iraqi style, and now we offer an Iraqi version of the *malfouf* for those who are interested in trying something new."

> "I wanted to employ half Lebanese women and half refugee women. I wanted to buy from local farmers and support the local economy."

The 11-woman crew at the House of Mouneh includes three nationalities. Though most are Muslim, some are Christians who were forced to leave Syria and Iraq because of religious persecution and the war. Some are from major cities, such as Aleppo and Damascus, and are dressed in T-shirts and blue jeans. Others are from more rural or conservative parts of Syria and Iraq and wear the traditional hijab head covering with long skirts or dresses.

However, all of them are required to wear hairnets and rubber gloves while working in the kitchen and handling the food.

"Professionalism is key," Hajj says, winking and snapping a hairnet.

Not just a charity

The idea for the House of Mouneh was born in 2014 when Carol Malouf—a Lebanese

Three women with the House of Mouneh collective make the vegetable-stuffed cabbage rolls called *malfouf*.

journalist, at the time working as an aid worker on the Lebanon-Syria border—saw firsthand the effects of the Syrian refugee crisis on Lebanese society. While many of the refugees were in a desperate situation, often fleeing their homes with little more than the clothes on their backs, their presence—mostly in already poor areas of Lebanon—was causing tensions with the local population, many of whom felt that refugees were competition for already-scarce work.

After witnessing these tensions bubbling in her homeland, Malouf was inspired to create a project that would be economically beneficial for both refugees and Lebanese communities, rather than just serving as a charity for refugees. Armed with a copy of *Mouneh: Preserving Foods for the Lebanese Pantry*—a sort of bible for the production of *mouneh*, by Lebanese chef Barbara Massad—Malouf put out a call for the women who would become the House of Mouneh.

"I wanted to employ half Lebanese women and half refugee women," Malouf says about the creation of the House of Mouneh. "I wanted to buy from local farmers and support the local economy." The mountain village of Falougha seemed a natural headquarters for the project, located as it is between the Bekaa Valley, the breadbasket of the country and home to many of the country's 1.2 million Syrian refugees, and Beirut, where the women could sell their products.

Longing for home

In addition to creating opportunities for peaceful communication between Lebanese and refugee communities, the House of Mouneh is also specifically oriented toward creating a means for women to support themselves. With little work for refugees in Lebanon, many men who were once the sole providers for their families find themselves unemployed, leading to extreme poverty inside the refugee camps—and also increased instances of domestic violence.

Malouf hopes that offering women a means to support themselves—or at least to leave the house—might ease these tensions and give women the independence necessary to start a life on their own if needed.

"Many of these women have never worked before, particularly those from more conservative communities," Malouf continues. "So it is an opportunity for economic empowerment as well."

Although the project is mostly funded by the U.S. Embassy and grant money from Malouf's umbrella organization, Lebanese4Refugees, the final *mouneh* products are packaged, marketed, and sold in a variety of different places, from farmers markets in downtown Beirut to culinary outlets in the mountains of Lebanon.

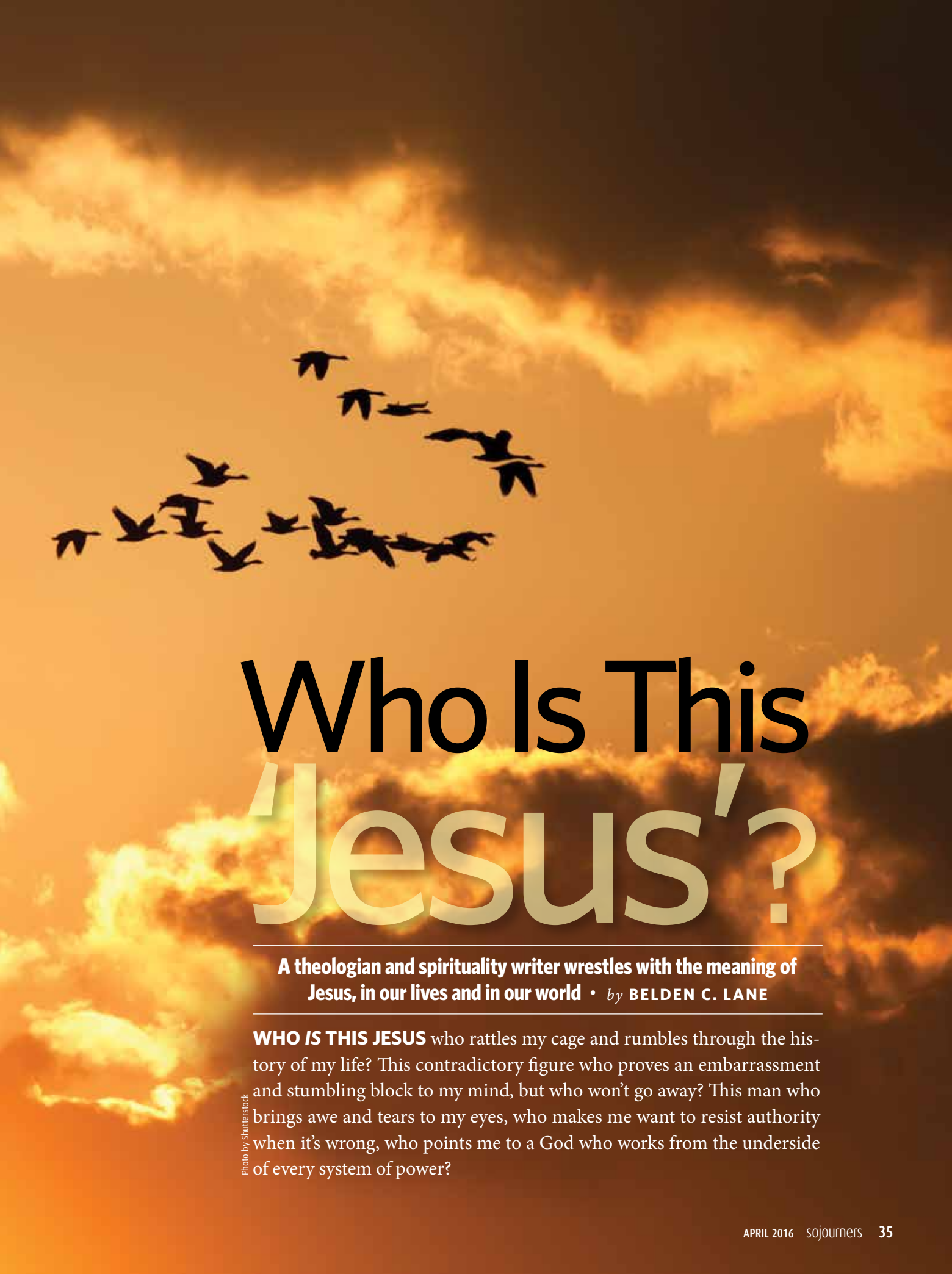
"Now I have a little bit of extra money for my children," says Fatima Hamdou, a refugee from Aleppo, Syria. "It feels good to be able to buy them something nice every once in a while and not just be focused on putting food on the table."

Though Hamdou knows she's better off than many other refugees living in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East, she still longs for her homeland—to which she hopes to return, when the war is over.

"I'm happy for my life here, and I have it much better than other refugees," Hamdou continues, while stuffing cabbage leaves and carefully setting them aside to be preserved in oil as *malfouf*. "But I really would give anything to be able to go back to Syria." ■

***Anna Lekas Miller** is an independent journalist based in Beirut.*

This is the Jesus who lures and seduces my heart, making me fall head over heels in love with a God more sensuous than I can imagine.

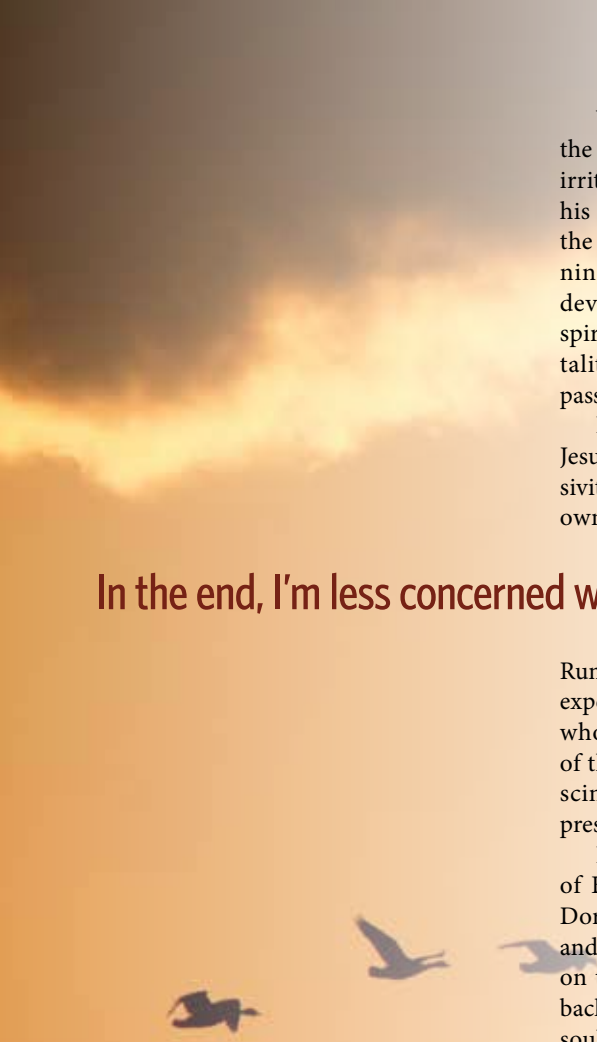


Who Is This 'Jesus'?

A theologian and spirituality writer wrestles with the meaning of Jesus, in our lives and in our world • *by* **BELDEN C. LANE**

WHO *IS* THIS JESUS who rattles my cage and rumbles through the history of my life? This contradictory figure who proves an embarrassment and stumbling block to my mind, but who won't go away? This man who brings awe and tears to my eyes, who makes me want to resist authority when it's wrong, who points me to a God who works from the underside of every system of power?

Photo by Shutterstock



Who is this Jesus? Disturbing teacher of the gospels, comfortable with children and irritating to scholars, unsettling people by his enigmatic stories. Dancing member of the Holy Trinity, looking out from a stunning Russian icon. Object of saccharine devotion in the Sacred Heart of Catholic spirituality, the "Jesus and me" sentimentality of evangelical piety, the unbridled passion of 17th-century metaphysical poets.

He's the first-century Jewish rabbi of the Jesus Seminar, calling for justice and inclusivity, making no ethereal claims about his own divinity. He's the Jesus of Jelaluddin Rumi, who wants to be born in the mystical experience of every soul. The Cosmic Christ who weaves his spirit through the fabric of the natural world, causing all things to scintillate with the sacramental, Christic presence of the divine.

In the end, I'm less concerned with *defining* Jesus than I am with *experiencing* him.

He wanders in and out of my reading of Bernard of Clairvaux, Marcus Borg, Dorothy Day, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and John Shelby Spong. Each with a finger on the mystery of this figure who pulses back and forth in my life: "Jesus, lover of my soul." "He walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own." "Jesus, the very thought of thee."

This is the Jesus who refuses to be contained in rigid, orthodox formulas of doctrinal correctness. The Jesus who wasn't content with remaining an *exclusive* Son of God, insisting that *all* are beloved sons and daughters of the Most High. Who stays restless in promoting the work of deification—turning every human being (the whole of *creation*) into the image and likeness of God.

This is the Jesus who lures and seduces my heart, making me fall head over heels in love with a God more sensuous than I can imagine. But he's also a Jesus who bugs the hell out of me, uprooting my comfortable white, straight, male, middle-class values. He roams the streets with the homeless, far from the gilded crosses of suburban sanctuaries. He's the fierce Pantocrator gazing down from an Orthodox monastery chapel ceiling. Yet he rages against those who turn him into an other-worldly savior, safely ascended into heaven, too distant to be real.

"Call me by my true names," cries Thich Nhat Hanh ... and Jesus, as well. I'm Warner Sallman's head of Christ, he says, *and* the Piss Christ of shocking modern art. I'm Francis of Assisi's leper on the road to Perugia and Mary Oliver's snow geese announcing my participation in the family of things. I'm the grieving women of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the men of the military junta who haven't yet learned that power is not truth. I'm the redwood trees cut down by Pacific Lumber and the out-of-work loggers whose families have to eat. I'm the young girl trapped on a boat of refugees in the South China Sea and the pirate who rapes her. I'm all of these broken, vulnerable beings, yearning for the wholeness and healing of the earth. I'm gestating in the pregnant soul of a 12th-century Persian mystic and tasted on the tongue of a Buddhist monk at tea. I'm the Jew that Christians have wanted to turn into something else and the messianic critic of imperial power that first-century Judaism found uncomfortable. I'm there in the revival tent at the end of the sawdust trail and in the harmony of plainsong at vespers in a Dublin convent.

WHO *IS* THIS Jesus? He keeps out-growing—and yet building upon—all my inadequate images of the past. The Jesus of summer Bible camp, sung around campfire embers. The Jesus of Anselm's Canterbury, causing me to wonder why God became human. The little Mexican kid named Jesús, begging in the streets of Juarez. The Jesus of Karen House, a Catholic Worker community in north St. Louis, and the young people of Taizé.

Post-liberal, post-evangelical, post-Catholic, can I almost say post-*Christian* people like myself (?) remain hungry for a Jesus they can take seriously. Able to summon them to something powerful and life-changing and world-affirming. They have to reject a Jesus who remains too small, even as they remember scraps of a devotion that once moved them.

My own journey with this Jesus forces me into an ever-widening inclusivity, from the evangelistic fervor of Moody Bible Institute to the challenge of doctoral studies at Princeton. I've sung gospel songs at Youth for Christ rallies, French psalms with Dominican monks at the École Biblique, civil rights songs of the '60s in the South, Leonard Cohen tunes with eclectic Christians in the wilderness of Alberta. I've seen Jesus in a mariachi Mass in Cuernavaca and a sixth-century icon at St. Catherine's monastery beneath Mt. Sinai. In Lakota songs sung by Navajo brothers

in an Arizona sweat lodge and in the most critical biblical scholarship. In post-colonial critiques of those who use Jesus to camouflage injustice. Every time he is more—and less—than I anticipate ... yet enough to hint at what I still hope for.

At the age of 10, fresh from a Wednesday night prayer meeting, I began writing a "book" about this astounding figure, Jesus. It was my first effort as a writer, scribbling on the pages of a ringed notebook. I was overwhelmed at the time by what it was like to experience God in human life. I've never gotten over the fascination.

In the end, I'm less concerned with *defining* this Jesus than I am with *experiencing* him. I'm more taken by his vulnerability than by his claims of miraculous power. Yet I hear him in the crack of thunder echoing through Ozark hollows, in much of what I've never been able to explain.

He affirms my doubts. Encourages my yearning. Forbids my indifference. I can't get away from him. Nor—at last—do I want to. ■

Belden C. Lane, *author of* The Solace of Fierce Landscapes *and other works, is professor emeritus of theological studies at St. Louis University.*

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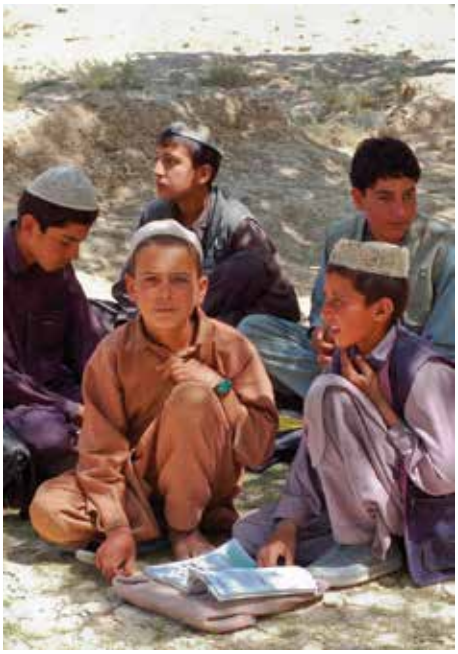

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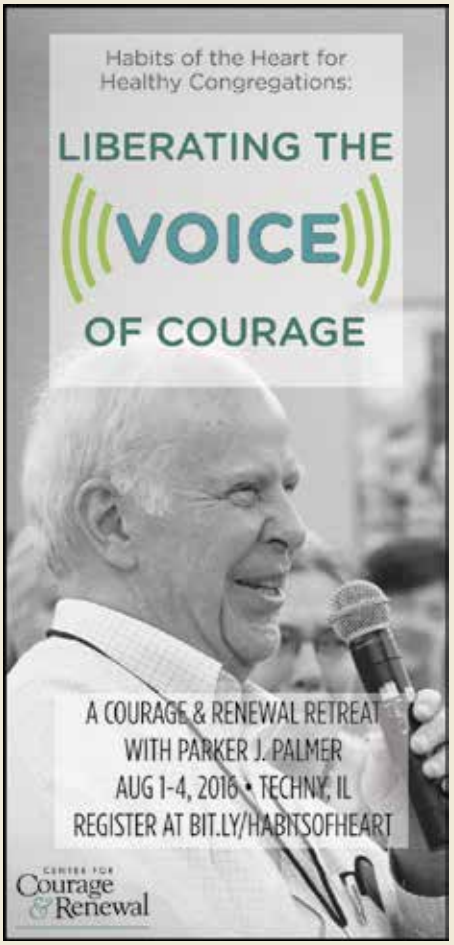

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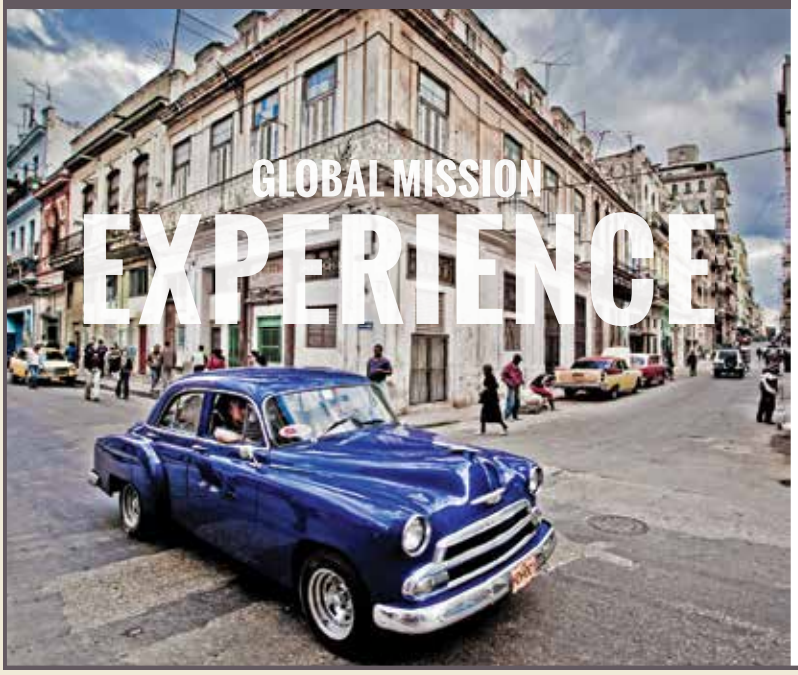

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By Jason Howard

Graveyard **Poet**

Kathleen Driskell on living *Next Door to the Dead*

ABOUT 20 YEARS AGO, just after she and her husband had bought a house in the countryside outside of Louisville, Ky., Kathleen Driskell returned home from the grocery to find her driveway filled with cars. With one arm grasping bags of food and the other holding on to her young son, she looked around to see what was happening. Mournful figures in dark coats were moving back and forth in the lot next door to her house. And then her eyes rested on something that made her jaw drop: a hearse.

On one hand, Driskell shouldn't have been surprised. The house she and her husband purchased was actually an old country church dating from the 1850s, which they had begun converting into a home, transforming the sanctuary into an open living and dining room and using the honey-colored pews to build a staircase. Like most rural churches from the 19th century, it was right beside a graveyard. But the old preacher who sold them the building had assured them it was no longer in use, that there would be no more burials. "I asked him flat out," she recalls with a smile. "And he said that it was full up and it's been full up."

Over the years, there have been eight or nine more burials in the graveyard next door.

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Noel Paul Stookey's *At Home*

Shutterstock

But after recovering from her initial shock at happening upon that first scene, Driskell realized that she didn't mind. "I just don't think about graveyards that way," she says. "I never really have thought about them as being spooky places." Instead, she has found herself inspired by the cemetery and its dead—so intrigued, in fact, that she has written a poetry collection about her experience with her "neighbors," as she calls them, documenting her literal and imaginative walks among the tombstones.

When it was published in August, critics hailed *Next Door to the Dead* as "an arresting testament" that "gives honor to the dead, and also praises the living." Poet and Pulitzer Prize finalist Maurice Manning observed, "One of the impressive features is how it works not simply as a collection of poems, but also as a whole book that deepens and expands with each page."

Such depth is due to Driskell's undeniable gifts as a poet, in her ability to excavate layer after layer of the twin themes of loss and mortality. In "The Mower," the narrator observes the stoic man who arrives on Saturday mornings to trim the grass around the grave of his young son, wondering if it triggered poignant memories for him of mowing "a yard with fruit / trees and a swing set and a fire pit / and a swimming pool that sits above ground, and a fort that threatens to collapse."

"Lament for the Crow" captures the narrator stumbling upon a dead bird in the graveyard, its form "resting in a cradle / of long soft grass." She spies its living kin in the nearby treetops, and observes how "Like / humans, they confront / the open grave in their own way."

> "When you're doing your laundry and you see gravestones, you realize that 'I'm not going to be here forever.'"

Poet Kathleen Driskell

Driskell says that the collection itself began in a similar fashion, from the bird's eye view that her home offered. Although she had written several poems over the years set in this graveyard and others, the idea for a themed collection began with the death of a neighbor's 23-year-old son and the grief that she witnessed at his burial next door. "It's just different when a young person

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New & Noteworthy

STRINGS WITH WINGS

Performing as Kishi Bashi, violinist Kaoru Ishibashi's pop songs swirl together indie, classical, and prog rock. It's not religious music (though lyrics sometimes hint at a church upbringing) but can transcend through pure exuberance. On *String Quartet Live!* he performs backed by a chamber ensemble. Joyful Noise

PEOPLE POWER

If Your Back's Not Bent: The Role of the Citizenship Education Program in the Civil Rights Movement is civil rights leader Dorothy F. Cotton's story of a key, but unsung, grassroots advocacy training program for disenfranchised people throughout South. Insights for then and now, newly released in paperback. Atria Books

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE

A compilation of essays written by current and former prisoners, alongside commentary from psychological, legal, and ethical experts, *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement* illustrates the gruesome reality of a "cruel and degrading punishment." The New Press

STOP THE DAMAGE

In their new book for church leaders, Cody J. Sanders and Angela Yarber provide a guide to identify *Microaggressions in Ministry* and suggest key steps to create a more inclusive church structure for people of all races, genders, and sexualities. Westminster John Knox Press

BY DANNY DUNCAN COLLUM

Now *That's* Grand Theft

WRITING FOR a monthly magazine requires a long lead time. These columns are turned in several weeks before you see them, so they need to be timely, but not *too* timely. And that can be frustrating. But from now on, whenever I am tempted to complain about that fact of life, I will instead think of poor Michael Moore and the way current events have conspired against his latest movie, *Where to Invade Next*.

Way back in the 1980s, with the surprising success of his comic deindustrialization tale *Roger and Me*, Moore stumbled into a career as a feature-film director. But at heart he remains what he always was: an advocacy journalist. He wants to tell the story of his times in a way that will inspire people to act for change. In fact, his last job before he started making movies was a brief stint as editor of the monthly *Mother Jones*. Two constant themes resound through all his work, in any medium: outrage at the gross injustice of the U.S. economic and political order and faith in the capacity of ordinary Americans to change things.

Director Michael Moore in *Where to Invade Next*

Reuters

Moore suggests invading other countries to steal their best ideas.

But feature film is an even more unwieldy vehicle for telling the story of one's time than a monthly magazine. The financing and logistics are byzantine and overwhelming, and the lead time is measured in years. A few times over the past three decades, Moore has managed to overcome those odds and get a message into the theaters at exactly the right time, most notably with his fall 2004 release of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The national release of *Where to Invade Next* was scheduled for the same week as the New Hampshire presidential primary, the first primary of the season, apparently with the hope of hitting the election-year sweet spot again.

The movie's premise is that Moore will break the U.S. military's losing streak by invading other countries—not to change their regimes, but to steal their best ideas. With that, Moore is off on a tour of Europe, claiming long paid vacations and maternity leave in Italy, worker participation on corporate boards in Germany, top quality schools with no homework in Finland, free higher education in Slovenia, humane prisons in Norway, reasonable drug policies in Portugal, a crackdown on corrupt bankers in Iceland, and universal health care pretty much everywhere. Apparently to dodge charges of Euro-centrism, Moore even takes a side trip to Tunisia, where the post-Arab Spring government was putting an equal rights for women clause into its new constitution.

But by the time most viewers will see *Where to Invade Next*, its litany of Europe's social democratic achievements will already be long familiar as the basis of Bernie Sanders' claim that the U.S., "the richest country in the history of the world," could do better.

In addition, Moore uses the recent history of tiny, picturesque Iceland to launch an extended riff on the idea that things go better when women are in charge. That seems odd from a guy who is old enough to remember Margaret Thatcher, and it only makes sense as a play to influence the potential 2016 election of the first female U.S. president. However, the policy directions suggested by the rest of the film only make sense if one thought that female president was going to be Elizabeth Warren.

Where to Invade Next is still fun and occasionally inspiring, and it was probably expecting too much to think that Moore would catch the election-year zeitgeist again. In any case, he has, again, pulled off the not-inconsiderable trick of getting a shiny new piece of anti-capitalist content into U.S. malls and multiplexes, and we can't start taking that for granted. ■

Danny Duncan Collum *teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel* White Boy.

Continued from Page 41

dies," she explains. "[The people buried in the graveyard] are mostly really elderly people, and they were maybe the last of their families that were going to be buried here. And then you hardly see [their family members] again."

She says the young people "keep coming" to visit their friend. "They don't go away. Over the years there's been this sort of steady parade. That was really when I started to cohere around the idea [of] what it meant to have old graves, and new graves, and graves of people who were elderly, and people who were very young."

Driskell discovered that confining her collection to "the three-quarter acre of the graveyard" was creatively liberating. "I soon found that I could write about whatever I wanted ... even though I was writing about a really small plot of ground here. So [in the book] I have domestic violence poems, I have a lot of anti-war poems, relationship poems, a lot of poems about mothering. I

"Let us think of Wanda next time our phones ring."

have poems that are pretty historical. It kind of freed me to do whatever I wanted."

One element that she was determined to include was that of surprise. In a book filled with poems about death, she notes that a danger is that it could have become macabre, collapsing under the weight of darkness. To avoid this hazard, she decided to include moments of humor to inject some light, saying, "We have jokes about death all the time, and we have tons of euphemisms that are kind of funny." With that in mind, one can almost hear Driskell's laughter as she opens the poem "Epitaph: Jesus Called and Wanda Answered" with "Let us think of Wanda / next time our phones ring."

Despite the collection's focus on death, she believes that, at its core, the book is really about something else. "I think it's a book above love, or trying to find love," she explains. "I mean, I just have a different view—maybe because I look out the window and see [the graveyard] all the time. It weights me, but it's not like a burden—it's more like ballast, if that makes sense. If

BY GARETH HIGGINS

Tom Hardy, above, and Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Revenant*

HALFWAY TO **BRILLIANT**

WATCHING THE much-awarded film **The Revenant** is an ordeal, but its director Alejandro G. Iñárritu's films have such energy and compassion that I hoped the payoff would be worth the stretch. Iñárritu's early films *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams* rehumanize characters who make bad choices, with an attention to scale that might be described as Napoleonic.

The Revenant is the loosely historical tale of Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), an early 19th century fur trapper left by his companions for dead after a bear attack, agonizing his way to track his betrayer (Tom Hardy) through some of the most frozen wilderness in cinema. The commitment of DiCaprio and Hardy has been rightly applauded—this is a cold and exhausting way to make a film. And the craft is monumental—arrows seem to land on the audience, the bear attack is terrifying, the camera hardly ever stops moving. But the exploration of the futility of revenge at the heart of this story is confused.

The moving midpoint performs like a one-act play during a pause in hostilities on an insane battleground. Near death, Glass is picked up by a Pawnee man named Hikuc (Arthur Redcloud) who has escaped the slaughter of his village by another tribe and is wandering alone. Hikuc helps to restore Glass' broken body. Their conversation is simple—Hikuc is trying to find more of his people, giving up the chance at vengeance, because "revenge is in the Creator's hands." He'd rather rebuild some semblance of home than pursue the blood of those who harmed him. It's an amazing scene, ghostly and meditative; the kindest act in *The Revenant* is one wounded person helping another who in different circumstances might be his oppressor.

If the film had ended here, or had the courage of this character's convictions, it could have been one of the most powerful explorations of how violence repeats itself unless one party opts for total renunciation. What we get, however, is the opposite. Vengeance is made sacred and eventually Indigenous people are used as instruments of blood-curdling torture and murder.

Thoughtful films exploring trauma and violence do exist (examples include *The Secret Life of Words, The Night of the Hunter, Paths of Glory, Revanche,* and *A Short Film About Killing*). But while *The Revenant* is halfway to being brilliant, and the people who made it surely wanted to embody something more humane, ultimately it can't decide if "an eye for an eye" is preferable or merely inevitable. Both those choices omit the option to give up violence altogether. ■

***Gareth Higgins** is an Irish writer and the founder of moviesandmeaning.com.*

you're looking out the window when you're doing your laundry and you see gravestones, you realize that 'I'm not going to be here forever.' If you sit there and you watch people come in and out of the graveyard, you think about your own kids, and your family members, and the people you love, and how you want to treat them that day. Nobody who is buried there probably thought they were going there that day. Even if you're really ill, you just don't know."

That thought, formed in part by living in an old Lutheran church and peering at the adjacent graveyard, has helped Driskell construct what she calls "a kind of church of my own." For her, she explains, "Heaven is what you leave in the mind of others. When I think about immortality, I'm looking out there, and I want to be as good as I can, leave good memories for my children, try to be heroic if I can in my little ways, try to treat other people kindly, so that there's a little piece of heaven left in their minds about me. And that's why writing is so important, too—really we're talking about leaving stories."

Driskell has plenty more of those in store. Later this year, Red Hen Press will publish her fourth poetry collection, *Blue Etiquette*. Inspired by Emily Post's classic *Etiquette*—the blue linen cover on the first edition released in 1922 became so iconic that later editions included the subtitle *The Blue Book of Social Usage*—Driskell's collection includes poems based on characters and rituals of domestic life and traditions. "When I read [Post's book], I realized that my folks would have been the servants that she was talking about managing," she smiles. "And so I've written poems [with] silverware, like an oyster fork or a fruit knife. I have restaurant poems in there, I have working-class poems, I have poems that are kind of done in [Post's voice]—things about work and manners."

In between her time serving as professor of creative writing at Spalding University in Louisville and associate program director of its acclaimed low-residency MFA program in writing, Driskell is also making a foray into fiction. Her novel, she says, is a coming-of-age story centered on a young girl in the Bible Belt that explores "the tolerance of religious people toward nonbelievers [and the] tolerance of nonbelievers toward the religious."

As Driskell moves through her home, walking up the stairs fashioned from pews and pointing out the tough, pre-Civil War roof beams, she says that she and her husband have talked about moving into the city, where they can be closer to restaurants and the theater. But she looks around now, surveying her home, and muses about how much of her identity is wrapped up in this old church, and among the gravestones next door. "It's amazing what you can get used to." ■

***Jason Howard** is the author of* A Few Honest Words: The Kentucky Roots of Popular Music *and coauthor of* Something's Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal. *His work has appeared in the* New York Times*, Salon, and on NPR.*

Reviewed by Ellen Painter Dollar

STEALING **HOME**

***Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City,* by Matthew Desmond. Crown.**

OF THE HALF-DOZEN homes that Arleen and her two boys lived in during 2008 and 2009, her favorite was a four-bedroom house on Milwaukee's North Side. Its exterior was only half painted, and the house was ultimately condemned as unfit for human habitation, forcing Arleen and her sons to move to a shabby apartment in a drug-infested neighborhood. Despite its flaws, as Arleen bounced from one apartment to another, applying nearly her entire monthly income to renting from landlords slow to make repairs but quick to evict, she would long remember that house for its space and relative quiet.

Arleen and her sons are one of the families profiled by Harvard sociologist Matthew Desmond in his masterful, heartbreaking book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. For his research, Desmond first moved into a trailer park on Milwaukee's predominately white South Side, and then into a shared apartment on the predominately black North Side. He observed and interviewed people such as Scott, a nurse whose drug habit led him to lose his license and end up sharing a low-rent trailer with a disabled veteran; Lamar, an amputee and father of teenage boys who lived in a dilapidated duplex until a fire destroyed it; and Vanetta, a mother of three who dreamed of an apartment with a bathtub for her kids and a good job, for whom a judgment lapse in a desperate time instead landed her a 15-month prison sentence.

Desmond also shadowed Sherrena and Quentin, owners of numerous low-rent properties around Milwaukee. The couple agreed to this arrangement hoping that people would see "what landlords ... go through." But they come across less as beleaguered landlords and more as opportunists who fund tropical vacations through a high turnover of low-income renters. They renege on verbal agreements with tenants, postpone desperately needed repairs, and start eviction proceedings when they realize they could get more money by finding new tenants instead of working with the current ones.

By entering into real people's lives this way, Desmond was not assured of happy endings, and *Evicted* doesn't have many. While some featured individuals make choices that worsen their situations, the primary story is one of impossible odds, broken promises, overstretched resources, and systemic racism keeping people in a cycle of eviction that destabilizes families and neighborhoods.

That so many of the featured families maintain hope and fight for their homes, however run down, makes their struggle to get ahead that much more difficult to absorb. Desmond closes with an epilogue that counters hopelessness with practical policy suggestions for helping all

low-income renters—not just those who qualify for public housing or Section 8—find and maintain decent housing.

Evicted makes a compelling argument that the lack of affordable, stable, safe housing is the primary problem keeping poor families poor and stuck in unsafe neighborhoods. As rents rise exponentially, families are forced to spend nearly their entire monthly income on substandard housing. Meanwhile, some landlords have realized that they can make good money by spending little on maintenance and repair, while cycling a series of poor families through their properties.

Our homes, Desmond concludes, are not merely shelter; they are "the wellspring of personhood," the place where we become ourselves. Homes that are broken down, unsafe, and regularly snatched away by a system stacked against poor renters exacerbate problems that go far beyond where a family will sleep tonight.

The poignant stories in *Evicted* and Desmond's clear-eyed remedies are perfect reminders that, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, "There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it." Matthew Desmond eloquently argues that we can help the Arleens, Scotts, Lamars, and Vanettas of our cities get and keep decent housing, and ultimately live more stable, productive lives.

The question, as always when it comes to our response to poverty, is whether we will seriously explore solutions or allow outdated economic models, entrenched prejudice, greed, and failures of compassion and imagination to condemn families like Arleen's to the dehumanizing pattern of repeat evictions. The stories in *Evicted* are a haunting plea for us to do the right thing by families who ache for the simple routines that build a life—evening baths in a working tub for the kids, dinner cooked in one's own kitchen, windows and doors that keep cold and danger out, a place to call home. ■

Ellen Painter Dollar *writes about faith, family, disability, and ethics for* Patheos *and elsewhere. She is the author of* No Easy Choice: A Story of Disability, Parenthood, and Faith in an Age of Advanced Reproduction.

Reviewed by Jenna Barnett

NO FUN AND **GAMES**

Overplayed: A Parent's Guide to Sanity in the World of Youth Sports, **by David King and Margot Starbuck. Herald Press.**

DAVID KING AND Margot Starbuck are nostalgic for the good ol' days of youth sports. In *Overplayed: A Parent's Guide to Sanity in the World of Youth Sport*s, the authors first critique the current youth sports machine by reminiscing about an athletic utopia of the past: One where kids used water bottles for goal posts and flip-flops for bases. Back when parents weren't paying up to $18,000 in hotel and trainer fees for elite travel teams. Back when kids loved sports.

This book intends to teach parents how to prevent burnout, overuse injury, and a misguided value system for their children. However, I read *Overplayed* as a young single woman learning to love sports again after suffering overuse injury and burnout right before college. I wish my parents—loving and good-intentioned as they were and are—had read this book 20 years ago.

King, athletic director at a Mennonite university, and Starbuck, a writer and a parent to three teenage athletes, believe that sports has the potential to be a powerful force in the lives of children. However, often money and myths corrupt that potential. Early on, Starbuck speaks wonders of the ways athletics teach us to know and love our physicality, explaining, "I came to know my body as good because of the opportunities I had to play sports as a girl." But with early single-sport specialization and year-round tournament schedules, children are coming to know their bodies as injured before they can come to know their bodies as good. The authors note that in 2014, 1.35 million kids suffered sports-related injuries that landed them in the emergency room. "'No pain no gain,'" the authors insist, "should have no place in youth sports."

And according to Starbuck and King, participation trophies and scoreboards (before middle school) also don't belong in youth sports. If parents can't find leagues that are willing to nix certain givens of youth sports, then the authors explain how parents can set up their own community or church league with parents who share their values.

As the advice becomes more value-driven and theological, it also becomes more challenging. After all, only in an upside-down world where the first shall be last would a university coach suggest that children can also benefit from playing on losing teams with lesser-skilled players. The authors continuously advise parents to decide on their values before deciding on a team—to choose, for instance, where they want to tithe before they nail down their travel-team hotel budget.

In 2014, 1.35 million kids suffered sports-related injuries that landed them in the emergency room.

While the advice in this book may seem restrictive to some, the authors have no intention of spoiling any of the athletic fun. In fact, the preservation of fun is one of *Overplayed*'s biggest goals. Midway through the book, the readers meet a college freshman named Katrina who was "made to swim," just like a fish. Toward the end of her high school career, college scouts came knocking, as eager to get her on their teams as they were to circumvent the 20-hour-per-week practice limit regulations. Katrina turned them down—saying no to the ultimate yet elusive dream of so many youth athletes. She wanted a life outside the water, and she got it. And because of that choice, "Katrina, the fish, still enjoys swimming."

There's just not much room for love and

joy in the billion-dollar youth sports industry. Far too often, youth athletics promote a macho culture in which only "one emotion is allowed: anger. The explosive, aggressive emotion, fueling adrenaline" and, ultimately, spoiling the fun. But the authors point out that the cardio-machismo, the overuse injuries, and the constant weekend travel don't just prevent youth athletes from loving sports, they prevent them from loving their neighbors. After all, how can a parent teach her child to love her neighbor if she's never in her neighborhood? King and Starbuck are determined to help us figure out just that. ■

Jenna Barnett, *a former editorial assistant for* Sojourners*, is a writer living in San Diego.*

Reviewed by Jeanne Torrence Finley

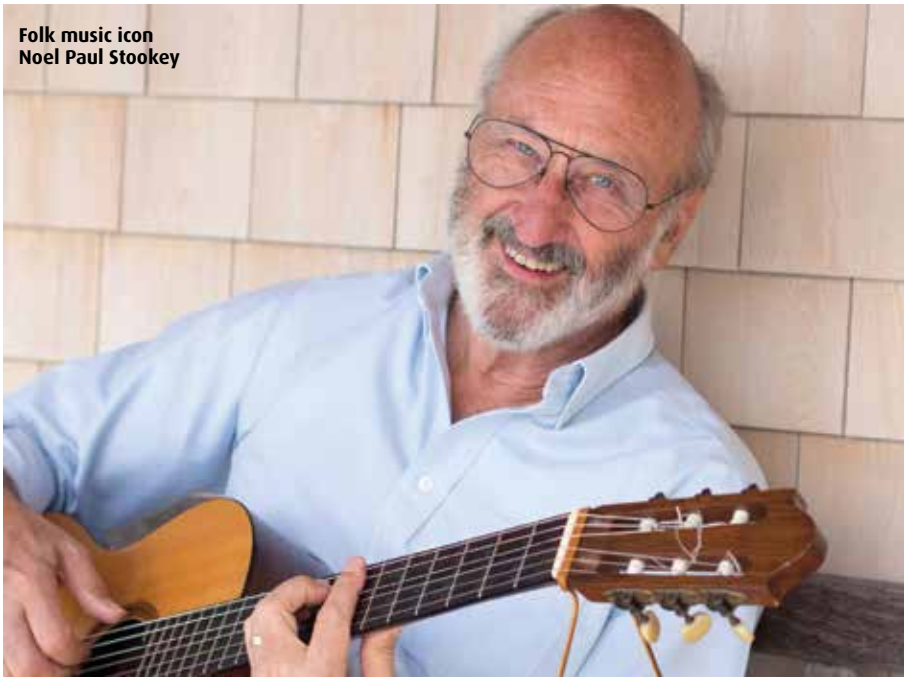
STILL SINGING OUT **LOVE**

At Home: The Maine Tour, **by Noel Paul Stookey. Neworld Multimedia.**

NOEL PAUL STOOKEY has been a musical voice for peace, love, and justice for more than 50 years. With his new solo CD/DVD set, *At Home: The Maine Tour*, he builds on the legacy of Peter, Paul and Mary as well as on his considerable solo work. The 24 songs on this album were recorded in a 2014 tour of nine towns in Maine, where he and his family have lived for some 40 years. They incorporate not just folk, but also rock, pop, and jazz. Although they span his career, they are not a nostalgic gaze at the past but a testament to Stookey's ongoing creativity and social ethic.

The performances are intimate and relaxed while possessing a vital energy that courses through the whole sequence. They warm the heart, evoke laughter, comment on social concerns, call for justice, touch pain, and promote Love with a capital "L." Through his stage presence, humor, and invitations to sing along, Stookey connects easily with a live audience. In the DVD, close-up shots of his hands and face give the viewer a feeling of a one-on-one encounter. Adding to the intimacy is the fact that the songs are from one voice and one acoustic guitar. Stookey's skillful playing exhibits the right combination of gentleness and boldness.

Stookey and his wife, Betty, continue the multifaith work begun when she served as chaplain of Northfield Mt. Hermon School in Massachusetts. Now called *One Light, Many Candles*, their presentations around the country combine readings from major world religions with Stookey's songs. Several of the songs on *At Home* are part of this program: "One and Many" and its meditative reprise reflect on the unity that is possible when diversity is respected and honored. "Facets of the Jewel" emphasizes how "our lives are connected."



Folk music icon Noel Paul Stookey

This multifaith work reflects a spirituality in Stookey's songs that has matured over the years. He is sensitive to the fact that church language simply does not speak to everyone. His goal is to bridge divides and create community. Never heavy-handed, his call to social justice seeks to open up hearts through music so that the audience can hear messages they may never have heard before and be moved to act. It is a spirituality that is firmly grounded in everyday life and love of neighbor.

The primary spiritual theme running through the album is love. In a couple songs—"Cue the Moon" and "The Love in You"—it is romantic love. In "Jean Claude" it is the love of friendship, the story of two friends in Alsace-Lorraine in 1941. One young man is leaving on a train to a Nazi death camp and the other is left wondering whether he could have saved his friend.

Many others contain references to what Stookey calls "Big L Love," which is a way of referring to God. "In These Times" speaks to the crises of climate change, greed, and lack of political and personal responsibility while affirming an incarnational Love. "Familia del Corazon" addresses the issue of immigration and asks questions that are particularly poignant during this time of national debate about opening our doors to refugees.

And who among us is not thankful?
Who among us would not choose
To share what we've been given freely...
Who among us would refuse?

Stookey says that "the songs that move us the most are the ones whose melodies invoke a passion and whose lyrics inform and inspire our lives; songs that transcend the moment because they are the articulation of our hearts." Such songs are abundant in *At Home*. ■

Jeanne Torrence Finley *is a United Methodist minister and a writer for FaithLink, an adult digital curriculum on current issues.*

BY MURIEL NELSON

Poet Maxine Kumin, an avid rider, with her horse Deuter. This photograph was taken by Jill Krementz in 1997 at Kumin's home in Warner, N.H.

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Saving Is a Form of Worship

in memory of Maxine Kumin

Amen, Max, to your restored fields,
your rescue dogs, your horses. And their storied
names from the O.T. you didn't believe
but loved the sounds of, calling Genesis
and Deuteronomy in for timothy and oats.

Amen to your kind permission to me,
your reader who saves too much, who keeps compost,
too, with worms, and the notion that names
can live in furred bodies or dirt or worse.
Much worse: Trident, Poseidon, Shock, Awe,

the necessities of water and board. Or ancient
letters *P, T, S, D,* or *A*
followed by *bomb*. Witnessing these
with our names on them, printing *terrorist* next
to American *I* poems, questioning all except inspiration

is church. *Gut honest* worship. Your forms
of nurture by the Word.

Muriel Nelson *lives in Federal Way, Wash. Her poetry collections include* Part Song *(Bear Star Press) and* Most Wanted *(ByLine Press).*

BY JASON BYASSEE

Easter: The New Normal?

THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER we all take a breath. We've worked hard to offer our best for Easter. Ministers often have had to preach more than our accustomed once a week. Choirs have gone all out. The sanctuary has been cleaned and decorated and trampled upon and cleaned again. Worship services may even have been lively and full. Now, as the Easter season settles in, all goes back to normal. We gather these Sundays not for spectacle, but for the risen Christ, refracted off the faces of one another.

The lectionary readings send us into unfamiliar territory. During these days, there's not an Old Testament reading in sight—the book of Acts functions as the history of God's faithfulness. Revelation tears a hole where Paul usually is. The gospel texts speak to the unbearable newness of a risen Lord reorienting the world around himself.

In the ancient church, those baptized at the Easter vigil would first be stripped naked before going under the water. They then donned a new robe as a sign of "putting on" Christ—and wore it throughout the Easter season. They went to church daily, learning what it meant to be "in Christ." Had they ever seen a baptism before attending their own? Had they ever shared in Eucharist until they tasted one? I wonder whether the Easter season can be a new normal. Not one where we settle for the ordinary, but one where we take part in the risen Christ's wrapping of all reality around the empty tomb.

Jason Byassee *holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia.*

[APRIL 3]

Doubt and Praise

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

IN ACTS, PETER SHOWS himself the patron saint of all civil disobedience: "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (5:29). Christians in the West are often known for our bellicose support of more muscular foreign policy and divisive domestic agendas. But Peter and the apostles suggest Christians should be known for constantly being at odds with human authority. Resurrection obliterates political quiescence.

The religious authorities object, of course. They accuse the apostles of always trying to "bring this man's blood on us." Peter seems to agree (5:30), but only *seems* to. The broad swath of the New Testament makes it clear that it is *we*, all of us, who killed Jesus with our sins. The government, the religious authorities, the ordinary people, even his apostles participated, collaborated, or fled. We killed him. Then he returns to us, his killers, with grace and forgiveness where one might have expected vengeance. Now we are a "kingdom of priests" (Revelation 1:6), called to mediate undeserved forgiveness to a world stupefied by it.

John's story of Thomas doubting that Jesus is truly risen from the dead is one of our best. (Caravaggio's painting "Doubting Thomas" perfectly captures the intense drama, with Thomas' finger probing the wound in Jesus' side.) Thomas' response after touching Jesus is the weightiest Christological confession in the whole Bible: "My Lord and my God" (20:28). Catholics are often taught to recite this phrase at the consecration of the host. Other Christians can say it too—when we see the poor, our enemy, those to whom we've made difficult promises, and the person in the mirror. Contrary to our objections, we are guilty of doubt, just like Thomas. Contrary to all logic, we are forgiven, just like Thomas. If this is true, then everything is different.

Psalm 150 registers the scale of this change. It is a cacophony of extravagant praise, of loud clashing cymbals! At the end of the psalm, at the end of this worship, at the end of our lives, all that is left is praise—exuberant, ridiculous, world-reorienting jubilation. In other words, church as usual.

[APRIL 10]

Death, Upended

Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

IF YOU'RE AN ATHEIST, and something really good happens, whom do you thank?

These scripture passages all reflect staggering reversal. The psalmist was dying and is suddenly, deliciously, unexpectedly alive. Paul is on his way to murder a religious minority and ends up joining it. The Lamb who was slain now receives universal honor. And Jesus is so presumed dead that his disciples are returning to their "pre-Jesus" lives.

Then something happens that upends death altogether. The sick one gets well. The slaughtered Lamb now rules. Paul is struck down, does not eat for three days and nights (his own passion), is baptized, and starts to preach (and to suffer—Acts 9:16). Jesus turns back up, knowing exactly where to fish to bring in miraculous hauls. This is all surprising—impossible even—to judge by our normal lights. But then, if God brought all things out of nothing, perhaps this is all a new normal.

Why does John specify exactly how many fish the apostles catch? Why 153? St. Jerome imagined it was the total number of fish species in the world, signifying the church's worldwide mission. But first century people already knew more than that many fish. St. Augustine does math. In the third era (the era before the law, the era under the law, and the era under grace) of history, 50 days after Easter (Pentecost), the triune God (three) extends the church to all nations. 3 x 50 + 3 = 153. Like that? On and on it goes.

> Love costs God everything and will cost us the same.

What do we know? All things, looked at aright, bear witness to the resurrection—even things as world-altering as miracles and as ordinary as random numbers.

"Preaching the Word," *Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.*

[APRIL 17]

Little Resurrections

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

SHEEP MAKE FOR some of our most predictable, clichéd lessons. So instead of starting with John 10, let's start with the "little resurrections" in Acts, shall we?

Peter raises a dead woman back to life. Tabitha hasn't been gone long. But gone she is: washed, laid out, not coming back. Unless there's a prophet nearby. Her friends hear there is. They fetch Peter.

Peter has read his Bible. He knows what Elijah did when a hospitable widow's only son died: Elijah stretched out on him three times and revived him (1 Kings 17:17-24). Peter knows what Elisha did when another widow's son died: He laid upon the child, mouth to mouth, eyeball to eyeball, and brought him back (2 Kings 4:18-37). So Peter has precedent—and he has prayers. Soon the woman, Tabitha, has breath and is making garments again. Peter is one of the prophets. Jesus' defiance of death is at work in him (Luke 7:11-17 and 8:41-56). I love how bodily these passages are, how specific (eyeballs and mouths and warm bodies and garments). God could heal at a distance, but instead comes unbearably close.

Back to the sheep. John's gospel describes a different kind of shepherd, one whose voice the sheep recognize. One who walks with us through dark valleys and sets a table in the presence of our enemies. One who lays down his life for the sheep. I'm no expert on shepherds, but I imagine if every shepherd were willing to die for every sheep, we'd soon have no more shepherds (without a few resurrections). Jesus works backward from the way we do and teaches us to do the same.

"Who are these, robed in white?" John's seer asks in Revelation 7:13. They wear robes of the sort Tabitha wove. What is necessary to wear a robe? A body. This is no disembodied, otherworldly hope. No. It's a hope as tangible as a poor widow who gets her son back, a middle-class craftswoman who gets her self back, a legion of saints who get their bodies back, just as Jesus snatched life itself back from death. And ever thereafter we're given eyes to see the little resurrections around us.

[APRIL 24]

Even Sea Monsters Praise!

Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

THE PSALMS in this season are a delight. Psalm 148 names, among those summoned to praise God, the heavens, the angels, the sun and the moon and the stars, sea monsters, fire and hail, snow and frost and wind, mountains and hills and fruit trees and cedars and wild animals and cattle and creeping things and birds. Praise!

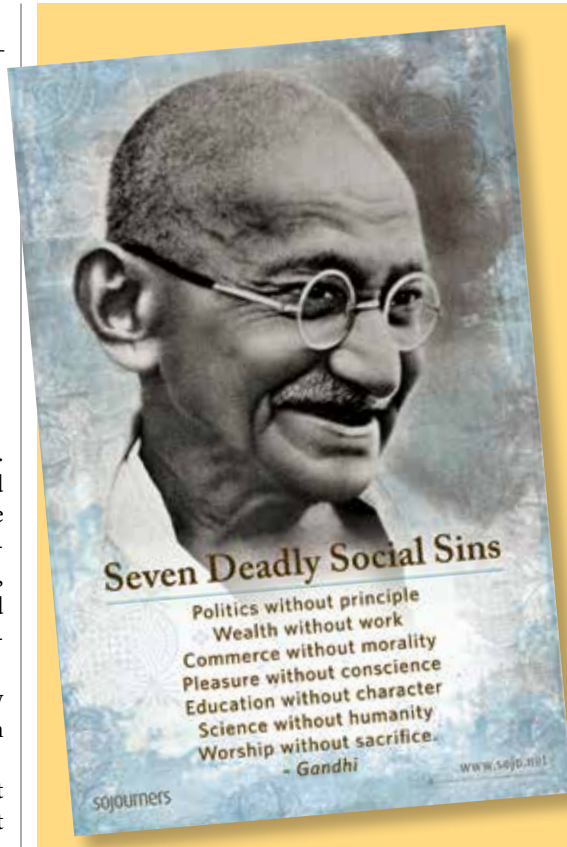
The implication is clear. All critters know they should praise—except for stubborn humanity.

These passages lay out some of the most common objections to faith. First, that it's only for a select few people who then look down on others. No, Acts says. God chooses Israel in order that, *through* Israel, God could get to all of us. Second, religion encourages otherworldly escapism and is an opiate to sedate the masses. No, Revelation says. Christian faith is about Christ *coming down* from heaven, making a dwelling place among us, bringing into being the world as God has intended it to be from the beginning. Third, faith forgets love. True enough, says John, so Jesus gives us a "new" command that's as old as commands get: Love. The new thing here is not the content but the speaker. The crucified and risen Christ is the one who commands us to love. Love costs God everything and will cost us the same.

And yet we praise. God has a strange way of reclaiming creation. God gathers up praise from the tiniest creeping things, the most majestic cosmic things, and the most elusive thing of all—the human heart.

It's true that religions will continue to exclude. People of faith will continue to obfuscate and be a tool in the hands of "the Man." We will forget love.

But that's probably true of everyone, religious or not. Yet God will get the universe of praise God intended from the beginning—starting with Jesus, stretching throughout God's beloved Israel, and even to us, reaching down to every depth and up to every height. And that's a reason to praise! ■



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The Winds of Change (do you smell that?)

THE BRIGHT LIGHT of a full moon cast long shadows on the snow as the firefighters walked up to my home. It was 2:30 a.m., and they tramped single file through the narrow trench I had dug, the exact width of a single snow-shovel blade. (I'm familiar with my sidewalk. I know what it looks like, and felt no need to uncover all of it from the two feet of snow that fell in late January. It was called "snowzilla" or "snowmaggedon," but I preferred to identify this monster snow as a "snonster." But that sounds like a head cold, and it never really caught on.)

The firefighters were responding to a call I made after awakening to the strong odor of burning. It smelled like leftover barbecue, which is an utter impossibility in my household because when we have barbecue, we eat it greedily while emitting animal-like growls to warn away other family members, then lick the empty plates clean in a state of giddy delirium. There are never leftovers.

(Editor's note: Okay, we get it. It wasn't barbecue.)

I rushed outside to see if a nearby home was on fire, and I saw nothing. But the smell was still strong, so I felt I had to notify the authorities. Figuring my editor was still asleep, I dialed 911 instead.

They were polite fire persons; they did not comment on my lackluster shoveling nor, as I stood stoically on the moonlit porch, did they discourteously remark on my mismatched pajamas. (The bottoms to my top were somewhere in a drawer, and the tops to my bottoms had been accidentally included in the Great Clothing Giveaway of 2012.)

They assured me the smoky smell was from numerous fireplaces and wood stoves in use during the blizzard, and that the extreme cold was keeping the fumes at ground level, a natural phenomenon. More important was what they *didn't* say: It was the smell of white people.

Ken Davis

WHEN WE MOVED in 30 years ago, we were the youngest family on our block, a quiet little street of neat houses and well-kept lawns, the pride of the mostly retired African Americans who lived there. They welcomed us and our little pink girls, even as we brought our native culture of intermittent lawn care, thrift-store porch furniture, and toy retrieval so infrequent it was once respectfully suggested we get a permit for our yard sale. We also caused more than one kindly resident to phone and ask if we knew our daughters were playing naked outside. Again.

They were beloved and caring neighbors, putting up with us and our unsightly ancient cars, our wild children, our casual Sunday attire. But one-by-one they passed on to their reward, hopefully streets of gold where the adjoining sidewalks are not littered with tricycles and various doll parts that I've been meaning to pick up.

The unbearable whiteness of plumbing.

Now *we* are the elderly people on the block, joined by growing numbers of young professionals who, to no one's surprise, have found their new homes insufficiently luxurious. (My home is insufficiently waterproof. But we have buckets.)

With their unbearable whiteness of plumbing, they are adding spacious kitchens with walk-in microwaves, bathrooms large enough to park a car in, and pop-up additions so high they blot out the sun, placing my yard—and its decaying sandbox and poorly constructed swing set—in shadows.

More to the point: Unlike members of the previous generation, who were content with basement furnaces and who used their fireplaces primarily to display dry flower arrangements, our new arrivals insist on seeing flames inside their homes on a winter's evening, warming themselves and their large dogs by a crackling fire or wood stove while sipping a sauvignon blanc. (The dogs prefer a red.) It's not enough to simply survive winter. One must be cozy. (I hear it's trending.)

But their comforts leave a large carbon footprint and create a reeking smog that draws the elderly onto their porches in mismatched attire, their mouths watering for the barbecue that these kindly firefighters must be bringing up the sidewalk even now. How thoughtful.

ONE MORE THING: If harsh winters require these new arrivals to resort to cannibalism, please note that the older folks down the street are a little gamey, and hard to chew. Whereas young professionals, well that's where the tender meat is. (Prepared correctly, it tastes like chicken.) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. *is art director of* Sojourners.

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